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ABSTRACT

In the past and present, the communities of Mount Desert Island in Maine have faced the issue of school consolidation. In 1948, the four towns of Mount Desert Island each had their own high school and several elementary schools. Despite an extensive survey and community discussion, the vote to consolidate into one high school was defeated in 1949 and again in 1959. In 1965, consolidation of the high schools was finally approved. Issues involved in the decision to consolidate included the recommendations of professionals, greater opportunities for students, a guidance program, preparation for transition to college and employment, and financial considerations. The less vocal dissenters feared loss of local control over the schools, community identification and involvement, and affordability. Interestingly, Tremont, the town with the lowest per capita income, spends the largest percentage of its budget on education, and its students outperform those from more affluent towns. The current debate on the Island concerns middle school consolidation, with little community support for the idea. The historical context for consolidation is rooted in urban and factory models of efficiency and efforts to correct inequalities in rural areas. Causes underlying consolidation include economics, politics, and social class. Resistance to consolidation may involve the reluctance of small towns to alter the culture of their communities. Current research shows that smaller schools often produce higher student achievement and higher rates of student participation in activities. (KS)

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CONSOLIDATION OF RURAL SCHOOLS: Mount Desert Island, Maine: A Case Study

Barbara Kent Lawrence

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FOREWARD

I am grateful for the opportunity to learn about the policy of consolidation and its effect on the communities of Mount Desert Island, Maine. It is always risky to look at one's own commuity as the prism of personal experience can be a distorting lens. I have used sources such as interviews, newspaper reports, and data, including school budgets and student performance scores to clarify my viewpoint.

My family and I have lived on Mount Desert Island for over fourteen years as "year-round summer people." Our children have attended two elementary schools, Pemetic in Southwest Harbor and Tremont Consolidated Elementary School in Tremont. Our daughter was a student for one year at Mount Desert Island High School.

Over the years, I have been puzzled by the apparent contradiction between the fact that Tremont students did consistently better on the Maine Educational Assessment tests than students from more affluent towns such as Southwest Harbor and Bar Harbor. It has been absorbing to delve deeper into this issue and more fully understand this "contradiction."

I am also grateful to the many people from the school system and community who have graciously offered their help and to my family of patient editors who now know more than they ever wanted to about consolidation. I started this project not knowing consolidation was such an important issue, nor that it affected rural aras so dramatically. The more I learned , the more I knew I had to learn. The project became consuming , and I leave it, at least temporarily, knowing there is much more to understand.

SCHOOL CONSOLIDATION ON MOUNT DESERT ISLAND, MAINE
A Case Study

THE SETTING

Even a superficial study of the literature of consolidation shows similarities in the response of small towns in very different communities. Weaver's study in West Virginia shows people acting out of similar concerns as those voiced by people in Page County, Illinois, Peshkin's research community. Although there are differences, Mount Desert Island's response to consolidation bears many similarities.

Mount Desert Island is connected by a causeway to the coast of Downeast Maine. At the time of settlement by whites in the mid 1700's, the economy was based on fishing and farming. In the mid and late 1800's the first, 'summer people' known as 'rusticators' came to the island, many building extraordinary summer "cottages," particularly in Bar Harbor and, later, in Northeast Harbor and Seal Harbor, both villages within the town of Mount Desert. The year-round population grew dramatically between 1890 and 1900 particularly in Bar Harbor where it climbed from less than 2000 to 4,379 (BlueBook,1993, p.11).

In the fall of 1947 a devastating fire burned many of the cottages in Bar Harbor, forever changing the social and physical landscape. Bar Harbor became much more oriented to serving tourists, and the colonies of Northeast and Seal Harbor became refuges for some of the wealthiest and best known families in America. These trends have continued to the present day.

Acadia National Park and The Jackson Laboratory have made a

major contribution to the Island. Since 1916 over 33,000 acres of Mount Desert Island has been donated by private citizens, including John D. Rockefeller, Jr.,for the creation of Acadia National Park which is now the second most visited park in the United States, attracting between 2.5 and 3.5 million visitors to the island each year. In 1929 , Dr. C. C. Little became the first Director of the Jackson Laboratory, overseeing eight scientists with four assistants. Now a premiere biological research facility, the Lab employs over six hundred people (Hallowell, Interview, Nov. 23, 1993).

Another important asset to the Island is the College of the Atlantic, funded originally by summer residents, which opened its doors in 1972. COA grants a single degree in human ecology and attracts an increasingly able student body of about 200 students each year. The College also has a small education department offering courses towards certification. The college places many students as interns in the local schools each year.

The towns of Southwest Harbor and Tremont are located on what is called "the backside" of Mount Desert Island. Southwest Harbor became the target of intensive development in the past decade because, unlike the Towns of Bar Harbor and Mount Desert, its citizens resisted implementing zoning laws, thinking such laws would restrict local owners' abilities to use their properties as they liked. Condominium development has brought additional income to an economy based on fishing, the Coast Guard base, boat-building, contracting and caretaking; however, within the past five years, the town passed zoning laws and hired a

Planner and Code Enforcement officer.

Tremont is the smallest, poorest and most traditional community on Mount Desert Island. Most people make a living by fishing, boat-building, caretaking, or contracting. Some year-round professionals have moved to the town as have young families whose choices were severely limited as real estate in the other towns became unaffordable to them. Now, even the 'backside' is very expensive and such families find it almost impossible to compete with prices offered by summer residents who make their living elsewhere.

TABLE TWO

PROJECTED BUDGETS FOR EDUCATION FOR 1993-1994

TOWN	ELEMENTARY	SECONDARY	% TOTAL BUDGET
Bar Harbor	$2,088,808	$965,486	49%
Mount Desert	$1,099,268	$731,035	45%
Southwest Harbor	$1,312,714	$442,197	63%
Tremont	$ 758,722	$311,131	71%

PER PUPIL EXPENDITURES FOR 1993-1994

TOWN	# PRIMARY	$ PER PUPIL	# SECONDARY	$ PER PUPIL
Bar Harbor	352	$3,589	172	$5,613
Mount Desert	246	$4,469	92	$7,946
Southwest Harbor	269	$4,880	92	$4,806
Tremont	164	$4,627	60	$5,186

This data highlights the extraordinary value residents of Southwest harbor and Tremont put on education. This is particularly true of Tremont which allocates 71% of its budget to education. Funding for the High School is based on an arbitrary formula. Funding for the elementary schools is voted on by residents at town meetings. In rural communities there may be less " municipal over-burden" than in urban areas, however, the above data compare four rural communities. Some, such as Mount Desert, have chosen to provide services such as garbage collection that other towns, such as Tremont have stripped away and spent on education.

(Information gathered from Town Offices, Schools and Superintendent's office.)

THE SCHOOLS

In 1948-49, there were fourteen schools on the Island, including four high schools and ten elementary schools. Today there are four elementary schools and one high school. During the debate over consolidation, in letters to the editor of "The Bar Harbor Times," many people articulated their reasons for supporting consolidation of the high schools. These people were well-educated professionals from the island or summer residents. One particularly forceful writer was Belle Smallidge Knowles.

Mrs. Knowles was born in 1871 on Mount Desert Island and received her B.A. from Boston University. She served as the first librarian in Mount Desert and founded the Northeast Harbor Literary Club. She was the first person in Maine to earn an appraisal license, the first woman in the United States to do so. She was a revered member of her community. Her letter presents both the history of education on the island and her convictions about the need to consolidate. It is important enough quote at length.

> In 1790 when the Town of Mount Desert comprised the whole of the island, a sum of 18 pounds (about $90.00) was raised by the town for schools. The town was divided into eleven districts, each district, according to the custom, having a school agent, whose duty it was to hire the teachers for his district. Schools were frequently held in private houses. After the Town of Eden (now Bar Harbor) was set off from Mount Desert, the town voted to build a schoolhouse which was constructed in 1807 in Hulls Cove. The building was 20 X 26 feet, possibly one of the first of the kind on the Island. However, as late as 1875 one-room school houses were found in nearly every community. The schools were ungraded, one teacher teaching all subjects, which generally included the 4 R's. From these primitive beginnings Mount Desert Island can...(words obscured on microfilm)..buildings and teaching staffs, admirable in many respects, that are generally considered inadequate
>
> 5

for present day needs.

> The trend of this generation is for better schools with a well rounded program of education that shall include social, recreational and special training adapted to the aptitudes of the pupils and to give each the best possible development during the school period.
>
> The time is particularly significant, The movement is in line with educational efforts in other places, making it possible to secure information and assistance from other examples. The youth of today is the greatest asset to our country. To obtain the best possible educatin during the school age is of paramount importance. It is the duty of the present generation to provide the opportunity. Great moral and social issues confront us today that are more serious than anything the world has previously witnessed. The issues must be met....It is imperative that the present generation , at whatever cost, provide for youth the best possible equipment during school....President Conant, of Harvard University, in an article entitled 'Force and Freedom', says :"The rules of war must never be allowed to dominate the ethics of our people. Control must be in civilian hands. If all concerned keep in the forefront of their minds the vital issue, the survival of our country, then we may believe the eventual decision will be sound.' On the proper education of the future generations will depend the 'eventual decisions.' Let us do our part to make them sound. The Bar Harbor Times, January 27, 1949, p. 1.

Mrs. Knowles spoke for the educated upper middle class residents of her town and echoed sentiments expressed by many reformers in education.

Southwest Harbor was originally part of the Town of Tremont, but "by the turn of the century citizens tired of the logistics of transporting their children long distances to attend a variety of different schools. After a long series of petitions, special town meetings and politicking in Augusta, Southwest Harbor finally got its own school and its own identity " (Bluebook, 1993, p. 16).

Southwest Harbor graduated its first class of 12 students

in 1912. Starting a few years later and continuing until consolidation of the regional high school in 1968, Tremont paid tuition to send its students to Pemetic, the high school in Southwest Harbor.

In 1948 there were still fourteen schools on Mount Desert Island. Each town, except Tremont , had its own high school. In addition, there were two elementary schools in Bar Harbor, four serving the town of Mount Desert, two for Southwest Harbor and three in Tremont. Although residents of Mount Desert Island voted against a regional high school for grades 7 - 12, the towns voted to consolidate the elementary schools. Tremont opened its new elementary school in Bass Harbor in 1951, and the elementary schools serving Mount Desert were consolidated at the same time when the new high school opened and younger students moved into the former high school building.

SCHOOL CONSOLIDATION ON MOUNT DESERT ISLAND

The precipitating cause for consideration of consolidation on Mount Desert Island in 1949 was that each town was forced to consider constructing new schools or additions to existing schools. Some buildings had become dilapidated and were considered unsafe, enrollment was growing "largely from the expected increase ... due to an abnormally high birth-rate...(as well as) a need for a different type of school program " (Survey, 1949, p. 21). In the spring of 1948, concerned citizens organized The Regional High School Committee chaired by R. Farnham Butler, a prominent islander who had been educated at Harvard. This committee decided to commission a cooperative study of their school problems "(Survey, 1949, p.9).

In the spring of 1948, Mr. Butler assembled a survey team of twelve professional educators to study the Island's schools. The project was underwritten by John D. Rockefeller, Jr., who, with his family, summered in Seal Harbor and was a generous patron of many projects. Obviously, most small communities would not have such resources. However, one consequence was that no people from the community served on the survey team.

The result of the survey was a seventy-six page pamphlet The Mount Desert Island Educational Survey:1949 that was comprehensive and carefully researched. In addition, members of the survey team held public meetings in the communities, and Mr. Butler wrote many letters to the Editor of The Bar Harbor Times.

From a professional viewpoint, the survey team did an excellent job. They looked carefully at the demography of the Island, inspected the existing school buildings, examined options in transportation, and projected budgets. The team had set guiding principles and agreed that its recommendations "must be made in the light of these principles"(Survey, 1949, p.9) These principles stated that recommendations would conform to law, be consistent with practical limitations and offer the "best possible educative experience for the individual " (Survey, 1949, p.9).

Several philosophical principles would guide the team in designing "the best educative experience."

> The public school is a unique institution provided by society for the sole purpose of assisting in the guidance and direction of the individual's total growth and development during his school life...The individual's growth and development has as its only purpose that of meeting his needs in order that he will be and will continue to be a worth member of his community - a good citizen... The individual's growth and development not only proceeds as a whole - physically, mentally, morally, emotionally, and socially - but is a continuous in nature...It is recognized that the school must take the major responsibility in certain areas , but act as a cooperating agency in other areas.
>
> Survey, 1949, p.10.

In addition, the survey team identified the five "competencies" recent research had identified as " the common needs of all children." These competencies included: Personal Competency, Family Competency, Social Competency, Civic Competency, and Vocational Competency. True to prevailing educational theories of the time the team assumed it was the responsibility of the schools to meet these needs by offering

FIGURE III

THE MOUNT DESERT ISLAND EDUCATIONAL SURVEY

MEMBERS OF THE SURVEY STAFF

WILLIAM O. BAILEY
State Department of Education, Augusta

JOHN C. CASS
State Department of Education, Augusta

JOHN R. CRAWFORD
School of Education, University of Maine

D. D. DOTTER
State Department of Education, Albany, New York

C. ELWOOD DRAKE
High School, Newton, Massachusetts

JOSEPH I. HALL
School of Education, University of Maine

ROME RANKIN
School of Education, University of Maine

WILLIAM SEZAK
University of Maine

MARK R. SHIBLES
School of Education, University of Maine

PAYSON SMITH
School of Education, University of Maine

WILLIAM K. WILSON
State Department of Education, Albany, New York

programs that would enable students to achieve " Health and Fitness both Mental and Physical," prepare for "Further Education, or Earning a Living, or Both," to make the :Most of the Environment," to learn to "Recognize, Appreciate, and Contribute to Beauty and Good Taste," to use their "Leisure Time Well," become "Self-Educating, " to "Grow Up," and to "Profit from Guidance " (Survey, 1949, pp. 26 - 29).

In spite of the tremendous efforts of the Regional High School Committee, the move to consolidate was blocked. On August 18, 1949 at a special town meeting residents of the Town of Mount Desert voted approximately two to one against forming a secondary community school district. Farnham Butler reports that he expected this vote as many of the less vocal citizens didn't want to lose their basketball team (Butler, Interview, Dec, 1, 1993).

In 1957, the State Legislature passed The Sinclair Act, authorizing the formation of School Administrative Districts. The law had been written by Dr. Carl Porter Shirley, a Professor of Education at the University of Maine in Orono. Dr. Shirley once told Henry Ashmore, then one of his students, that his only regret about the Act was its acronym "S.A.D." (Ashmore, Nov. 10, 1993, Interview). According to Dr. Ashmore the law was very controversial and the State tried to counter dissent by offering financial incentives. Maine later made consolidation mandatory for schools with fewer than 100 students unless they were located in geographically isolated areas.

The Sinclair Act stated: "It is declared policy of the State to encourage the development of school administrative units of

sufficient size to provide:"1. Opportunity. A more equalized educational opportunity for pupils; 2. Programs.Satisfactory school programs; 3. Tax rates. A greater uniformity of school tax rates among the units; and 4.Public funds. A more effective use of the public funds expended for the support of public schools " (Committee on Revision of Statutes, 1993, p. 232).

In 1958 members of the Mount Desert Education Research Committee, a group that seems to have been working towards consolidation during the intervening years, put a warrant on the list of matters to be considered at the annual meeting of each town. The towns agreed to the warrant which committed them to studying and considering consolidation. In town meetings in March, 1959, a total of 2011 citizens cast their votes: 1331 approved and 680 disapproved. However, because a majority disapproved in Southwest Harbor, the vote to consolidate was defeated ("The Bar Harbor Times." February 26, March 15 and April 2, 1959, p.1).

It is important to realize that the poorer towns voted more heavily against consolidation while the two more affluent towns supported a regional high school. It seems that cultural factors were more important to residents of Southwest Harbor than the financial benefits their children might enjoy from being in a high school supported by towns with more money to spend. Many people in Tremont feared they had no alternative but to support a regional high school as they did not have one in their town (Goodwin, Interview, Nov. 24).

In 1965, Mrs. E. Farnham Butler chaired a committee to

consider consolidation of the four high schools into one regional high school serving grades 9 - 12. This was possible because in February, 1965 the 101st Legislature had passed a special law, H.P. 475 "designed specifically for the situation at M.D.I. "(BHT, Feb.11, 1965, p.1). The law permitted towns to create a high school without putting their elementary schools into a consolidated S.A.D. Critical to the situation was the funding formula tailored to the needs of the island which provided that expenses would be apportioned "one-third in proportion to the number of pupils and two-thirds in proportion to the property valuation of each of the towns" (BHT, Feb. 4, 1965, p. 1.). This formula meant Bar Harbor would pay about 43%, Mount Desert 31%, Southwest Harbor 16%, and Tremont 8.5% of expenses for the Regional High School. (BHT, Feb. 24, 1965, p.5).

When people today talk about approval of the regional high school, they state that the change in the funding formula was critical. However, this does not jibe with the vote in 1958. Their argument is that, because Mount Desert had the highest tax base of the four towns, its taxpayers were reluctant to assume a disproportionate share of expenses and were concerned that the benefits their town could give students would be diluted in an island-wide high school. The change in the formula erased these fears.

The final vote was taken in the Town Meetings in March, 1965. Bar Harbor approved 676 to 144 , Mount Desert 318 to 169, Tremont 91 to 24 and Southwest Harbor 322 to 286 (BHT, Mar. 25, 1965, Apr. 1, 1965, pp.1).

THE LANGUAGE OF THE DEBATES

The debate on Mount Desert Island was conducted in letters to the Editor of the "Bar Harbor Times," editorials in that paper, community meetings held throughout the Island by proponents of the plans to consolidate and ,of course, in many private conversations. In 1949, members of the professional survey team attended meetings in each town to present the plan. These meetings were well attended and usually made the front page in a paper that often printed news of engagements and marriages as the lead items. The overwhelming majority of writers supported consolidation. Many of these people are still alive, and others who have died or moved away are still remembered by Island residents.

The people who actively supported consolidation were middle class and upper middle class year-round professionals such as C.C. Little, Director of the Jackson Laboratory, who had previously been President of the University of Michigan and before that President of the University of Maine (Hallowell, Interview, Nov. 18, 1993). Many prominent summer residents such as Lincoln Cromwell and Gilbert Kinney, also wrote in support of consolidation.

Dissenters were much less vocal. In hundreds of pages of coverage by The Bar Harbor Times, only three voices stand out. One writer is anonymous. A second writer, Mr. Stevens F. Hammer, a math teacher in Northeast Harbor, seems not to have had much credibility in the community. According to one of his students (a great grandson-in law and fervent admirer of Belle Knowles),

Hammer never fit in, was an alcoholic and left Mount Desert Island after a few years (Suminsby, Interview, Nov. 20, 1993). The third writer was Mrs. Marion Hayes who headed the PTA in Southwest Harbor. An independent group formed in Southwest Harbor to study alternatives, but The Bar Harbor Times did not carry news about their progress.

ISSUES

Speaking for her committee in 1965, Mrs. Farnham Butler summed up the advantages of consolidation as follows:

> The committee noted the following improvements available in a regional high school:increased specialization of teachers, better teachers, special classes for exceptionally bright and for exceptionally dull students, greater variety of courses, better vocational training, better school library, better physical education and more economical operations.
> BHT, Feb. 11, 1965, p.1

We will look more closely at issues she offered, as well as the important issue of professional authority and concern for guidance.

PROFESSIONAL AUTHORITY:

The arguments proponents used are now familiar. Reformers attempted to authenticate their authority by pointing to the professionalism of the survey team and playing on the fears of rural people that they lagged behind more sophisticated urbanites. At a meeting of the PTA of Southwest Harbor in January 1949, Dean Shibles told the audience of over two hundred people "that while the regional high school is rare in Maine, it is now the normal unit elsewhere "(BHT,Jan.6, 1949, p.1).

Several prominent local residents lauded the professional neutrality of the Survey team. Chairman E, Farnham Butler pointed out:

> These men, called in from outside, certainly have no local prejudices or any aim other than to discover facts, and recommend accordingly. May I point out that all qualified persons consulted in the matter - whether they came from the University of Maine, our State Department of Education, Massachusetts or New York, or elsewhere - have concurred in the recommendation for a regional high school because they are certain it will provide better education.
>
> BHT, Jan. 20, 1949, p.1.

Charles K. Savage, a noted local landscape architect from one of the oldest families on the Island, wrote to the paper stating, "since the report is coming out in favor of a combined Island High School and is without doubt the result of studies by men eminently qualified to judge, I believe that the Joint Island High School plan is the program which should receive support" (BHT, Jan. 20, 1949, p.4). In February, after release of The Mount Desert Educational Survey Mr. Butler announced that it "has been so well done that it is being studied in many schools and colleges, and the results being watched in educational circles all over New England "(BHT, Feb. 3, 1949, p.1).

On a related theme, the successful model offered by big business (particularly forceful in a community that benefitted so obviously from the support of families like the Fords and Rockefellers) was used to show Islanders they too could have successful, efficient schools. Writing in 1959 in support of the second attempt to consolidate the high schools, Beatrix Farrand, a nationally known landscape architect and summer resident,

proclaimed, " After all, if these United States and the great banks and businesses have found it wise and profitable to unite, should we not learn by their experience?" (BHT, Feb. 20, 1959, p. 1.) In 1965, it was front page news that the Fords and Rockefellers pledged $90,000 to the new high school BHT, Feb. 25, 1965, p.1). The success of the consolidators in gaining the support of the summer and professional year-round communities was impressive.

OPPORTUNITIES:Curricular, extra-curricular and social

Consolidators stated "that the only consideration should be to offer the best education possible "(BHT, Jan. 6, 1949, p. 1). They defined the "best" education as one that offered opportunities in several ways the existing schools could not. Philip Annis, State Director of Secondary Education in Maine, told members of the Southwest Harbor PTA that "the larger variety of subjects and social opportunities of a Regional High School would mean that more students could share in these richer, important experiences " (BHT, Jan. 6, 1949, p.8).

These opportunities were defined as curricular, extra-curricular and social. Dean Shibles, at the same meeting touted the benefits of

> increased athletic and health possibilities for all children, both boys and girls" and "modern facilities for the various sciences and for vocational training... and the advantages, both educationally and financially, of large classes as compared to small ones now existing at Pemetic, as well as for other Island high schools. BHT, Jan. 6, 1949, p.1.

At a meeting of the Bar Harbor PTA, Dean Shibles continued, stating " the proposed school would have all academic materials,

[and] all wholesome recreational activities "(BHT, Feb. 17, 1949, p.1).

In 1958 Joseph J. Devitt, then Director of Secondary Education for Maine, added another justification:

> The only real reason for consolidation of high schools here on Mount Desert Island would be the advantage of a better education program here for the boys and girls. The study has revealed...the strong need for designing courses to fit three levels of learning among high school students...There are fast learners, average learners and slow learners in every high school class. The proper application of education principles...indicates the need for separating these three levels of learning into groups so that each level will be taught at a speed consistent with its ability to learn. BHT, Jan. 30, 1959, p. 1.

Like other ideas introduced by reformers, tracking is now seen as a questionable method of teaching for all types of learners.

In 1965 Mrs. Robert Avery, wife of a prominent Bank President, noted that the effectiveness of The Bar Harbor High School was limited by small size, 118 students. " Some courses must be offered only alternate years and consequently can't be taken in the proper sequence by many of the students" (BHT, Jan. 28, 1965. p.1). The Survey team also decried the "total of 57 excessively small classes out of a grand total of 129" in all the schools on Mount Desert Island adding that " the usual class size generally recommended by authorities is 25 pupils " (Survey, 1949, p. 32).

The Superintendent of Schools concurred and added that the Regional High School would "1) provide more and stiffer competition which the student will meet in college, and 2)...

would allow more students to obtain advanced placement in college because of the breadth and depth of their training in the regional high school " (BHT, March 4, 1965, p. 1). The Editor of The Bar Harbor Times added his voice:

> No two students are alike. The student who seeks intellectual stimulation will find in a regional high school curriculum advanced college-type courses such as economics, advanced math, philosophy and psychology that would satisfy his intellectual ambition and better prepare him for the tough days ahead in his highly competitive college days." BHT, March 25, 1965, p. 3

Other writers picked up on the advantages of a Regional High School for athletics. When a member of an audience asked the State Director of Secondary Education if "less [sic] children could be on basketball and other teams " he "answered by saying that because of the larger squads, junior varsity and other teams more children would actually participate and that , furthermore, girls would have an equal opportunity. " New sports not possible would also be offered giving a chance for students to have a preference (BHT, Jan. 6, 1949, p. 8).

GUIDANCE:

Several educators explained that a guidance program, run by trained professionals was an important advantage of consolidation, promoting "the opportunities offered in a larger unit for an adequate guidance program - something now almost totally lacking in our high schools " (BHT, Jan. 6, 1949, p. 8). John C. Cass, a member of the Survey team added:

> Good guidance is the center and core of modern education... Guidance started in the very early years

> could prepare a child to meet the transition of life from a child to that of an adult upon leaving school to have equipped him to meet success, disappointments and setbacks. BHT, Feb. 3, 1949, p. 8.

The Survey Team devoted two pages to describing a good guidance program, stating such a program "can function only to the extent that each pupil is known, as an individual, to someone in a position to give him help and advice on his own personal problem (Survey, 1949, p.39). They followed up by listing various tests required for "this process of knowing" a student. And added that a good guidance program "require[d] the abilities found only among individuals with special types of training and experience" (Survey, 1949, p. 40).

TRANSITION to HIGH SCHOOL, COLLEGE and EMPLOYMENT:

Transition was another important theme for consolidators. Charles Savage warned citizens that "in our educational opportunities we must provide the very highest standards to permit our graduates to compete on equal terms with those who come from more populous places and larger schools, since many will not go on to college " (BHT, Jan. 20, 1949, p.8). Dr. Little suggested that a major advantage of consolidation was bringing students from the different communities together for:

> happy and constructive adjustment of different points of view. The methods of such adjustment having been learned in school would be easily transferable to the student's experience in college, where the same problem on a larger scale exists. At present there is absolutely no preparation for this transition BHT, Feb. 17, 1949, p.1

The current Principals of two of the elementary schools

echoed this theme in recent interviews. Although both opposed consolidation of the middle grades, each apologized for the lack of "technology" in his school and saw advantages consolidation might bring in better labs, equipment, and technological benefits. Both men thought exposure to "technology" would make transition to high school and post secondary school life easier for their students (Perkins and Ashmore, Interviews, Nov.10 and 12, 1993).

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:

Underlying all this discussion, and perhaps the fundamental reason the towns seriously considered consolidation each time was the deteriorating condition of school buildings and concern about annual school budgets. In 1993, these two reasons again precipitated consideration of middle school consolidation.

In 1949, the survey team studied each of the existing school buildings and determined that few met the needs of their students in health, safety, or space. In Bar Harbor, the elementary schools were described as unsanitary fire traps. The team recommended "that the whole building should be abandoned at the earliest possible moment " (Survey, 1949, p. 53). Bar Harbor High School built in 1907, occupied a location "without attributes as a satisfactory school site" except that it was central to the town (Survey, 1949, p. 53). The Somesville School " from a health standpoint, the lighting, the ventilation arrangments, and dark, unsanitary toilet facilities are all far short of the required standards for a healthful modern school" (Survey, 1949, p. 56). All the schools in Tremont received "a very low health

rating" (Survey, 1949, p. 60). Pemetic School, built of brick in 1938 in Southwest Harbor, was the newest and safest, but the team found it already overcrowded (Survey, 1949, p. 59).

Dean Shibles warned residents " if only one town builds on its own it will automatically assume the responsibility for limiting the opportunities for all children on the Island " (BHT, Jan. 6, 1949, p. 1). Mr. Annis added that they could "borrow an additional 5% under State law. He:

> further pointed out that this angle is really very unimportant in relation to the Regional High School, since the towns must all build separately if they don't do it together and that it would actually be less expensive to build a large unit than several small ones. Operating expenses would also be less.
> BHT, Jan. 6, 1949, p.8

In 1965, although Mount Desert and Tremont had closed their smaller, older schools and built replacements, school buildings in Bar Harbor and Southwest Harbor were crowded and unsafe. Tremont paid tuition to send its high school students to Pemetic, the high school in Southwest Harbor. This meant that the three poorer towns faced the expensive prospect of building new schools. Taxpayers also faced growing annual budgets, Bar Harbor's budget was up 7 1/2 %, Mt. Desert and Tremont had a 5 % school budget increase while Southwest Harbor restrained the increase to 1% (BHT, Feb. 4, 1965).

According to some people, the primary reason for consolidation of the high school was that "Bar Harbor had a tradition of not properly funding its school. It's the same thing now. Bar Harbor is looking for a way to avoid over-crowding and

not put more money into its school " (Perkins, interview, Nov. 8, 1993). "Bar Harbor put itself into a box. They were very short-sighted and built onto Conners School. They never should have sold the land next door to the housing for the elderly. Now they have no where to expand. They are cheap - they have a tradition of under-funding their schools " (Ashmore, Interview, Now. 10, 1993).

As mentioned previously, Mount Desert Island did not adopt the Sinclair Act, authorizing formation of S.A.D.s. To meet the needs of Mount Desert Island, the legislature passed a law authorizing creation of Community School Districts, a special act

> that provides that operational and construction costs are to be apportioned among the participating towns according to the following formula: 33 percent of the total cost to be assessed in proportion of the number of resident pupils in grades 9 - 12 and 67 percent in proportion to the state evaluation of each town."
> BHT, Feb. 11, 1965, p. 1.

This was a critical accomodation to the relatively low birth rate and high tax base in the Town of Mount Desert. Residents of Mount Desert thought the formula would protect them from assuming a disproportionate share of the burden for consolidation, but this has not been the case. At a recent public meeting about consolidation of the middle grades, community members from Mount Desert said they would "never be caught again" by such a formula because they now pay about $12,000* to send each student to the high school. Towns tuitioning students to the school pay $5000 per student and the average cost per secondary pupil in Maine in

*see Table III for actual figures

1991 was $4,562 (Maine Dept. Ed, 1993,p.1). The lure of private donations and state funding also helped convince residents to approve consolidation.

THE DISSENT

The votes made it clear that there was dissent, but people rarely voiced their disagreement publicly. This is an important concern, a factor the "impressive" team of experts failed to take into account, and something we will look at more carefully when we consider cultural differences between people in the four towns. For now, let us look at the issues raised by the few people who openly disagreed.

ISSUES

LOCAL CONTROL:

This can be seen as a political and cultural issue. People from the smaller towns feared that a governing board made up of members from each town would be dominated by Bar Harbor members. At a meeting of the Southwest Harbor PTA, Elwell Trundy asked how a Regional High School would be managed and was told by Dr. William O. Bailey, a Survey team member, that there would probably be three members on the board from Bar Harbor, two from Mount Desert and Southwest Harbor and one from Tremont. When another member of the audience voiced concern about Bar Harbor's controlling the board, Mr. Bailey replied, somewhat in jest, " an easy solution is making a Bar Harbor person the Chairman, thus reducing their vote to two!" (BHT, Jan. 6, 1949, p.1). In 1965 the Editor of The Bar Harbor Times told the residents of

Southwest Harbor that their:

> noteworthy argument, loss of local control of secondary school education, is definitely legitimate," but went on to say that though they feared under-representation on the proposed ten member board " It must be remembered that citizens have no direct control over education. It is through their school board that they may influence education policy"... "Any problems of the school would affect all the towns, not just Southwest Harbor...and complaints from any town would certainly receive fair consideration.
>
> BHT, March 25, 1965, p.3

At a recent meeting of the School Board, the representative from Southwest Harbor said, " explain what you mean by loss of local control. Mount Desert Island is very homogeneous. If I moved to Bar Harbor, I wouldn't change. Can't we prove we have been doing this [consolidation] by having an excellent high school. So what does loss of local control mean?" (Meeting, October 28, 1993). However, that this man is a "year-round summer person" a highly educated upper middle class transplant to Mount Desert who seems not to understand the fears "backsiders" and people from Mount Desert have of the voting power of Bar Harbor. The School Boards now reflect the patterns of in-migration of middle class and upper middle class people over the past ten years.

Concern about domination by Bar Harbor was voiced by Principal Henry Ashmore when he pointed out that his school has an average class size of 16. He said he and others fear Bar Harbor would vote against funding such optimal class sizes in a consolidated middle school. In the meeting, Principal Ashmore stated that " with one man one vote Bar Harbor would wield too much power" (Ashmore, Interview, Nov. 10, 1993 and Meeting, Oct.

18, 1993).

Community members expressed their fear of loss of local control when they talk about issues like busing. In 1949 Mrs. Hayes, head of the Southwest Harbor PTA said her members "do not like the idea of their children riding so many miles on the bus to and from school. This would mean that they would have to leave early and get home late, losing a good deal of contact with their homes and community " (BHT, Feb. 17, 1949. p. 8).

Principal Val Perkins feels the same way today: "If you increase their hours in a bus, you take the hours away from something " (Perkins, Interview, Nov. 8, 1993) Robert Suminsby, a prominent businessman in Northeast Harbor, and long-time devoted Scout Master, said recently that in the "old days" people lived in the villages and few children had to be bussed far. Now families live much farther from schools and the children don't seem to be as much a part of the life of the villages. We lost the kids from the community, you just don't see them as much " (Suminsby, Interview, November 20, 1993).

Consolidators answered questions about busing by pointing out that the Island roads were now "covered" [asphalted] and therefore safe, and that efficient circular routes were possible. Shuttle-busses would take students home after extra-curricular activities (BHT, Jan. 6, 1949, p. 1). They seemed to have missed the underlying concern on the part of community members that the children would be removed from the community for long periods of time.

Others wondered about who would teach their children.

Speaking for her PTA members, Mrs. Hayes asked:

> How would the people who are sending their children to school and paying the bills know who are teaching their children? Would the normally infrequent P.T.A. meetings and school receptions during the year afford the desired personal contact between all the parents in the four townships and all those who would be teaching their children under the Regional High School plan?
> BHT, Feb. 3, 1949, p. 8

Forty-four years later, Principal Val Perkins, who has headed Tremont Consolidated Elementary School for twenty-five years, can answer that many of his teachers are from the community, former students at the school who have returned to share their knowledge and love of the community with students there now. A local concern , however, is that teachers and other people serving the communities on the Island can no longer afford to buy a house as property escalates in value.

COMMUNITY IDENTIFICATION AND INVOLVEMENT:

Writing in 1977, Jonathan Sher and Stuart A. Rosenfeld showed that consolidation had significant effects on community life in rural America.

> The traditional sense of involvement, intimacy and identification between rural parents and their schools diminished. By inaugurating a formalized, standardized, and urbanized educational system, the traditional continuity between rural eduction and rural life was weakened.
> Sher,Ed., 1977, p. 41.

Using the same arguments, Val Perkins defends his small school by citing the high degree of involvement felt by teachers, children, administrators , parents and other members of the

community at Tremont. "Individual involvement is the key. The community and parents and teachers and students must be involved. You have to create a climate where there is involvement" (Perkins, Interview, Nov. 8, 1993). He reports that all of "his children" are involved in extra-curricular programs at Tremont School because he and the other teachers think that "children are more successful in school if they are involved. 'The more frills the more skills.' If kids are involved in music, sports , drama they do better in everything else." (Perkins, Interview, Nov. 8, 1993). Principal Henry Ashmore adds that "there is lots of participation and that would be reduced if we had a Middle School consolidated. Very few kids don't participate" (Ashmore, Interview, Nov. 10, 1993).

As noted earlier, another key factor is participation of the parent and community in the life of the school. Mr. Perkins points out that "this used to be an agrarian society and parents were home, now parents need school to stay in contact. It's like the school is an extension of the family." He sums up the feelings of many in his community by adding " today children are in need of good solid fundamentals and good solid people who know them and like them and want them to achieve" (Perkins, Interview, Nov. 8, 1993).

Surely many urban teachers and parents would be amazed by extent of Mr. Perkins involvement with 'his children.'

> Parents want an environment that is safe and nurturing, they want to know Mr. Perkins will call if there is a problem in the lunchroom, the child isn't eating, or someone got into an argument or was rude. They want to know if their child seems unhappy or is going through a hard time or not doing homework.

Such caring has probably pulled many children away from the fringes of school activity into involvement and changed behavior that might have become problematic without early intervention.

Mr. Perkins and many others think parents in a lower-income rural community can be intimidated by schools, particularly if they fear their children aren't doing well and are competing with children from more 'advantaged' families. Even in a school so close to its community as Tremont , some parents are apprehensive about coming to school.

> I have Moms and Dads who will come to talk to me when I'm around town, at Thurston's Wharf or in the Town Office, or the market. More come to talk who I meet accidentally than make an appointment to come to the office. They start talking about the weather or lobstering but soon they work around to wondering about how their child is doing, or how school is going this year. It's something that's been on their mind but for whatever reason they don't come in to talk. Perkins, Interview, Nov. 8, 1993.

Accessibility to the school and school personnel is important in the more affluent community of Mount Desert as well. Dr. Ashmore also thinks it is critical to a child's sense of the value of his or her work at school that the community demonstrates its support by involvement with the school (Ashmore, Interview, Nov. 10, 1993). Children in Mount Desert enjoy that kind of involvement with their community as seen in many ways. Attendance at school games, concerts, and productions is high; children are invited to display art projects in the Bank, Town Hall, and many storefronts; the school band plays at many public functions such as parades, the Town Christmas party and the entire school dresses up for Halloween and parades through town

to the enthusiastic applause of almost everyone in the town.

In 1949 Stevens K. Hammer asked the residents " are you in favor of taking away from your community and your children one of the backbones of Maine life - the community school and community school spirit?... A great portion of our winter life is made up of following with avid interest , our own community school's activities and basketball team. The consolidation plan would erase all this" (BHT, Jan. 13, 1949).

It would be hard to under-emphasize the importance of basketball in Maine. It is difficult to untangle this thread from the complex fabric that led residents to vote one way or another on consolidation of their schools. However, we should not discount basketball as it was mentioned as a factor in their decision by many residents of Mount Desert Island over the years.

Bernie Parady, Coach and Math teacher at Gilman High School in Northeast Harbor and later Athletic Director at the Mount Desert Island Regional High School, supported consolidation but added that consolidation was so divisive that there are still families whose members will not speak to each other. Mr. Parady states that basketball was a key issue for many who were enormously proud of their town teams (Parady, Interview, Nov. 20, 1993). Henry Ashmore noted that towns such as Bridgewater (off the Island) left consolidated systems because they didn't like losing their basketball team (Ashmore, Interview, Nov. 10, 1993). Two issues concerned voters: involvement of students in basketball and the enjoyment and pride adults took in their town teams. Basketball games are a major source of entertainment for

rural communities during the long New England winters.

In 1958, the PTA of the Town of Mount Desert held a panel discussion for students on the issue of consolidation. A panel member, Joyce Higgins, who much later taught drama at the consolidated high school, said "Let's face it, basketball means more to our parents than it does to us (BHT, Feb. 13, 1958, p. 4). Stevens Hammer spoke out for the importance of the team to the town, as did others. Each person interviewed mentioned the importance of the teams to townspeople, and the pride residents took in their successes. Whether parents cared more than their children, or not, basketball was the decisive issue for some voters and remains an important focus and source of recreation for parents and their children.

Dr. Ashmore and Principal Perkins, as well as many parents and teachers still express similar fears today in regard to consolidation of grades six through eight. They wonder how it would be possible to continue the two-way communication and support between the school, its students and the community if children were bussed out of the town. Peshkin addresses this issue:

> When the school is down the street; parents feel they can be instrumental in what happens to their children, in physical, moral and intellectual terms. The school's physical proximity, particularly if it precludes bussing, creates the impression of security and safety; distance creates the impression of inaccessibility; if not powerlessness, and of possible contact with strangers.
>
> Peshkin, 1982, p. 163.

Clearly, proximity to the school can be a very important issue for parents who are intimidated by institutions, and by

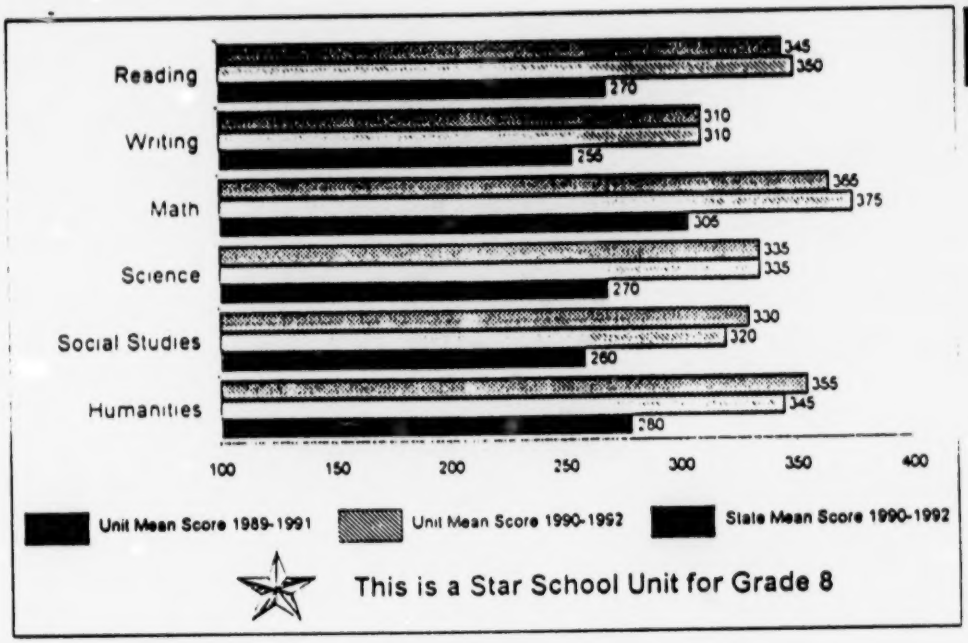
professional administrators. Proximity to the school makes attending games and other productions easier for parents and having town teams gives a community pride and cohesion.

ECONOMIC:

Economic issues concerned many parents. It is important to distinguish, however, between issues of cost and affordability. Cost is simply the financial expense of consolidation versus support of smaller schools in the towns. " Affordability" touches a cultural issue by underscoring the relative abilities of the towns to pay the financial burden. Throughout the debate proponents of consolidation have assured citizens that the costs would be no greater and might, even be less for a regional high school and for the consolidated middle school currently being debated.

The four towns approach the issue of affordability from a different perspective. Year-round residents of Mt. Desert, living in the town with the highest tax base, pay a tax of $6.85 per $1000.00 of assessed value. The mill rate for the other towns is much higher: Bar Harbor 12.35, Southwest Harbor 12.78, and Tremont 10.60 meaning those residents pay a higher rate of tax on their properties (Town Clerks, Interviews, November, 1993).

Figure 14
Grade 8 - MEA Scores: Three Year Average



BAR HARBOR

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Figure 14
Grade 8 - MEA Scores: Three Year Average

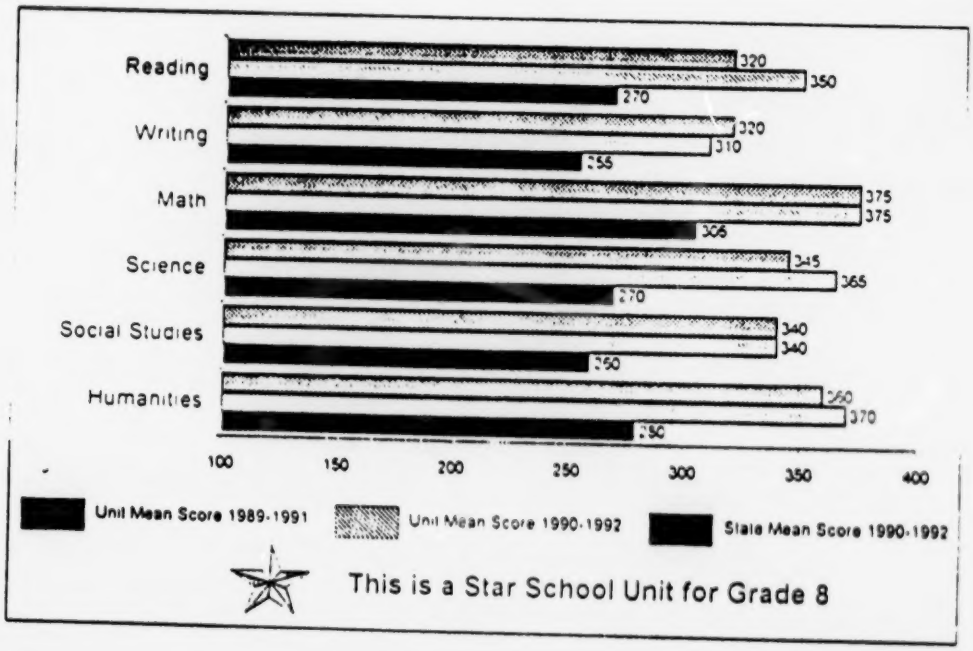


FIGURE IV

1991 - 1992

Figure 13
Grade 4 - MEA Scores: Three Year Average

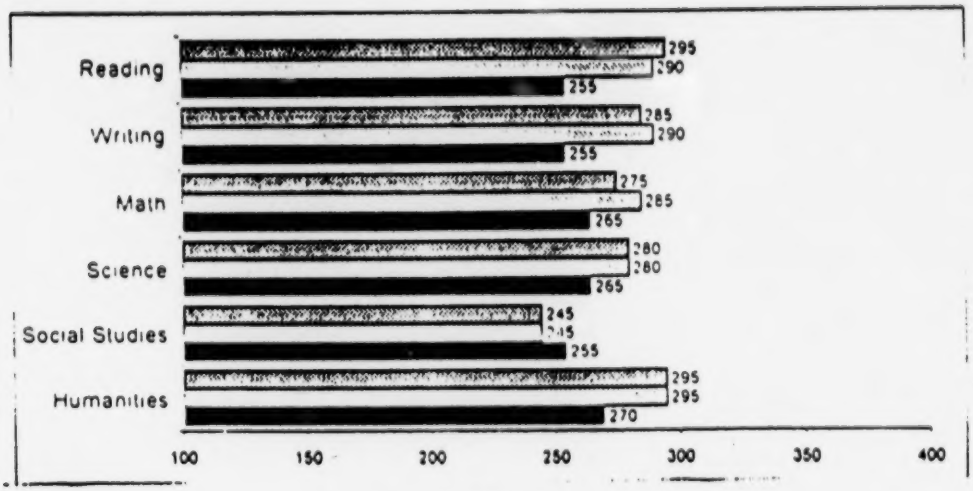
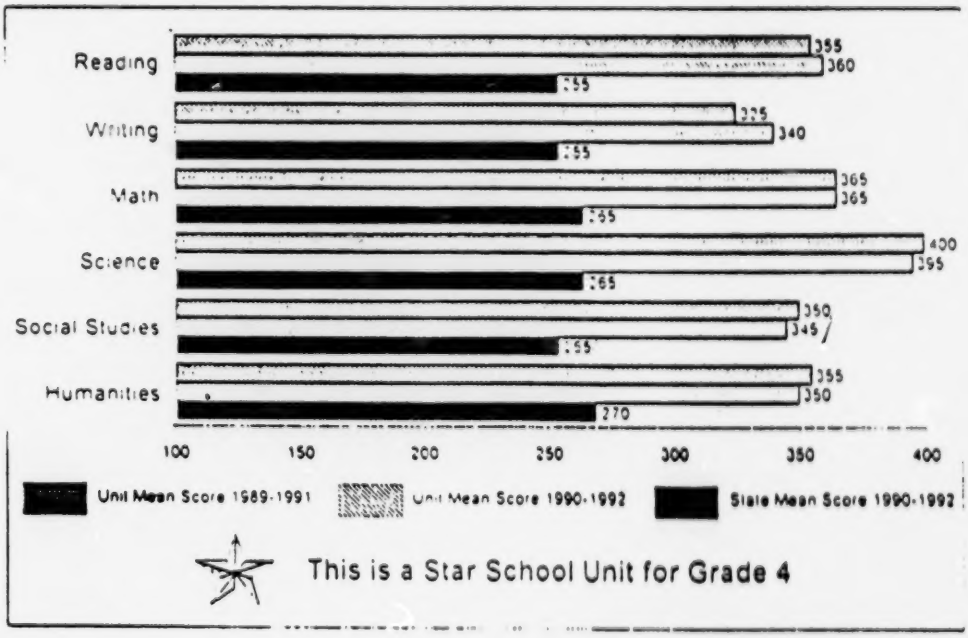
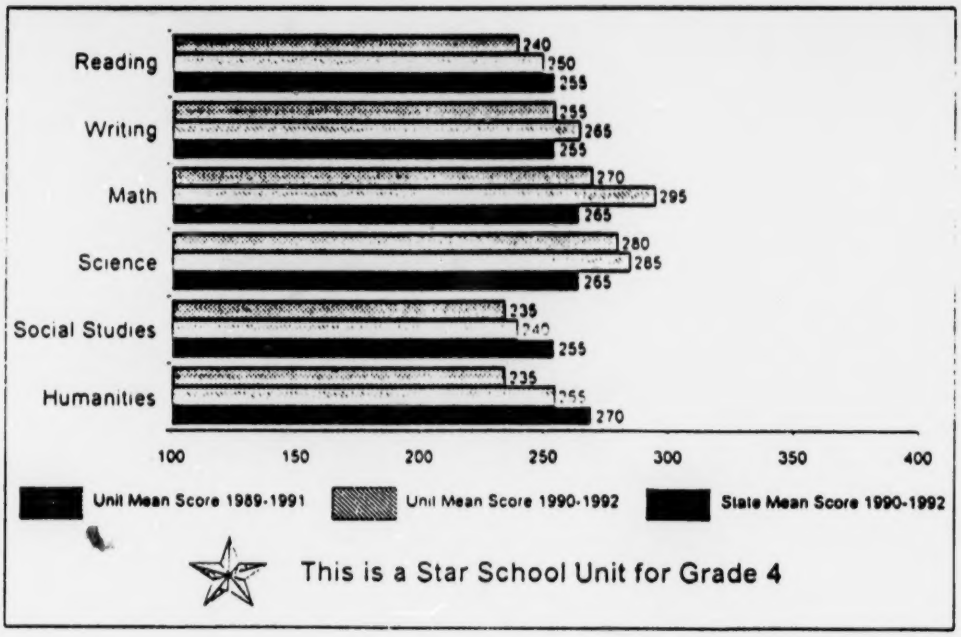


Figure 13 BAR HARBOR
Grade 4 - MEA Scores: Three Year Average



Grade 4 - MEA Scores: Three Year Average 1991 - 1992



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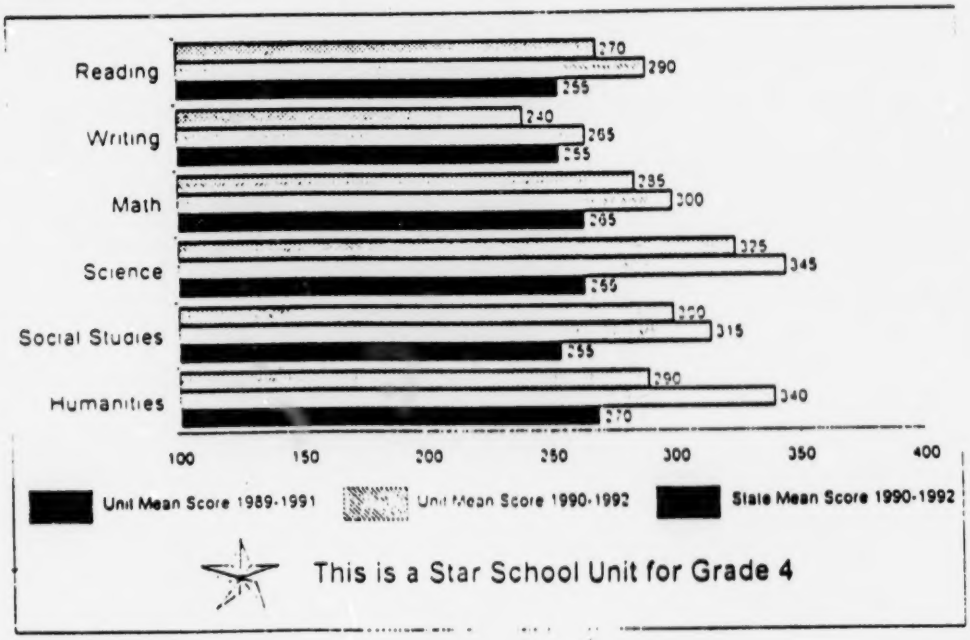
SOUTHWEST HARBOR

Figure 13
Grade 4 - MEA Scores: Three Year Average



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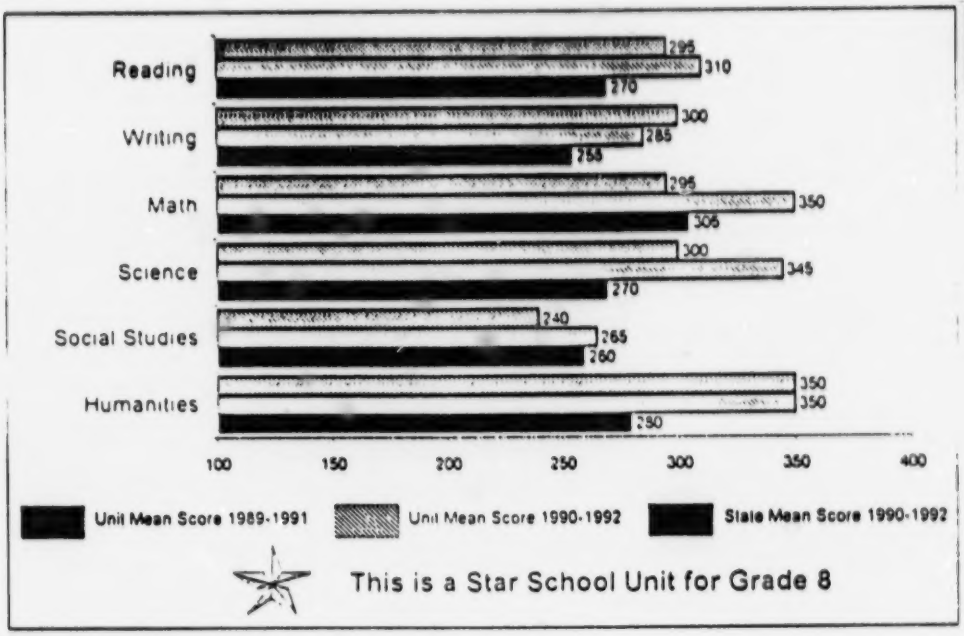
TREMONT

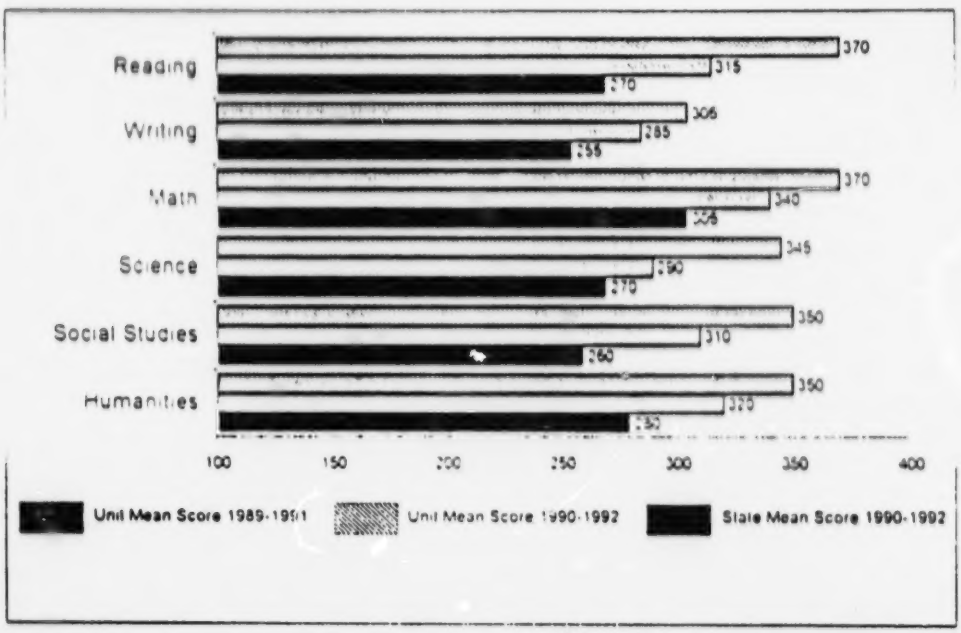
Figure 14
Grade 8 - MEA Scores: Three Year Average



SOUTHWEST HARBOR

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Figure 14
Grade 8 - MEA Scores: Three Year Average



TREMONT

INTERPRETATION

How can we explain the different ways in which the four Island communities dealt with the issue of consolidation? Clearly, this paper is a first glance. In order to be assured that our preliminary findings are valid or to uncover other issues, we would have to conduct many more interviews and look in greater depth. However, we do have some initial suggestions.

As we have seen, Bar Harbor has a tradition of under-funding education and trying to use the other towns to ameliorate its own situation. Southwest Harbor and Tremont are the poorest towns and the two most removed from the 'central' location chosen for the High School and the proposed consolidated middle school on the outskirts of Bar Harbor. But the voting pattern for the Regional High School was markedly different in these towns. In 1959, Southwest Harbor was the only town to vote against consolidation, and their vote blocked formation of the Regional High School at the time. In 1959 Tremont approved consolidation by a vote of 112 to 90 and in 1965 by more than four to one. In Southwest Harbor, which had staunchly opposed consolidation until 1965, the vote for approval was an unenthusiastic 322 - 286.

In fact, the only vocal, 'grass roots' opposition to the Regional High School as reported by "The Bar Harbor Times" came from Southwest Harbor. Southwest Harbor was the only town to launch an alternative committee to study consolidation. This committee was to be composed of a person from each occupation business and profession in the town, but its work was not

reported further by " The Bar Harbor Times" (BHT, March 25, 1959, p.1).

UNDERLYING CAUSES FOR CONSOLIDATION IN EACH TOWN

How can we account for the differences in the ways the four towns perceived consolidation of the regional high school? Although there are differences in socio-economic stucture, and in 'class,' it seems most helpful to use the lens of 'culture' to see the underlying causes most clearly. The predominant cause for consolidation expressed consistently over time by residents of Bar Harbor has been the economic benefits they perceived. Fortified by other arguments consolidators presented, residents of Bar Harbor could press for a regional high school or consolidated middle school in good conscience. They had nothing to lose, as the regional schools would be located on the outskirts of Bar Harbor, and much to gain, as there was no other way to provide an education for their children using money from the other towns.

The situation in the town of Mount Desert was quite different. As the most affluent town on the Island, Mount Desert could afford a fine school, well-equipped and well-staffed. Mount Desert seems to have supported the regional high school because prominent, vocal well-educated middle class people spoke out in support of consolidation. These people were most vulnerable to the arguments of professional educators because they were well-educated professionals themselves.

Tremont is the poorest of the towns, but has the highest

percentage of homeowners, residents who were born in Maine (70.7%) and the lowest percentage of residents living in a different house in 1985 (33.1). The population of Tremont also has the lowest percentage (less than 3%) of students in college, graduates of high school or higher (76%) and college graduates (16.8%) (Census Table 19, 1992).

Peshkin underscores the strengths of homogeneity in defining "integrity." "Completeness, wholeness, unity - these are the characteristics of integrity that make the term so appropriate in describing a village." And suggests the "spiritual wholeness" can be inferred from the "capacity to mount and sustain a response to perceived threat " (Peshkin, 1982, p. 157.)

This principle can be applied to the resistance marshalled by the Town of Southwest Harbor, but it does not explain the lack of resistance shown by Tremont, the Town with the greatest homogeneity and " integrity." For that we must look at the cultural values in Tremont concerning education.

Even a superficial glance shows us that the residents of Tremont value education highly, further research might even substantiate that education and educators are held in greater respect than in the other towns. This is suggested by the following anecdotal evidence and some "hard" evidence as well.

There is a strong tradition in the town of seeing education as " a way to betterment." (Perkins, Interview, Nov. 8, 1993, Goodwin, Interview, Nov. 26, 1993). Eight of the teachers at the school are from the community, former students who have returned to share what they have learned. The Tremont School Fund,

started by parents in 1984, and funded by community efforts and donations from summer residents has granted about $25,000 and currently has assets of over $63,000. Tremont is the only Town to have initiated a fund that underwrites proposals from teachers for projects not covered by tax funds. Tremont has no problem finding parents to coach teams and bus students to games, whereas Bar Harbor, with a much larger population to draw from, has great difficulty doing so (Brown, Interview, Nov. 26, 1993). For many years Guidance personnel at the High School have said that students from Tremont are better prepared academically, and more ready to learn than students from other towns (Olson, conversations, 1985-93). Mr. Perkins added that because students knew the town struggled to support them financially and in other ways, they worked very hard and were always top of the honor roll (Perkins, Interview, Nov. 8, 1993). The value of education in Tremont is demonstrated most dramatically by the MEA scores.

MAINE ASSESSMENT SCORES

Maine students have taken State and national assessment tests which give us a remarkable picture of their attainment. The State of Maine began giving an assessment test to children in grades 4, 8 and 11 in 1983. Results show the unit (grade in a particular school), mean score , and the State mean score. Results are averaged over three years.

Results for the schools on Mount Desert Island show that students from the Town of Bar Harbor, the town with the second highest per capita income, underperform when measured against students from Tremont, the town with the lowest per capita income. Students from Southwest Harbor, from families with the third lowest income perform about the same as students from Bar Harbor. Students from Mount Desert, the most affluent town on the Island, have done better on the Maine Assessment test than students from the other towns. It is remarkable that performance for students from Tremont, particularly the 8th Graders from 1989 - 1991, was higher in several categories than scores achieved by 8th Graders in Mount Desert for the same period and that overall the scores of students from Tremont and Mount Desert are quite similar.

As we know, Bar Harbor has spent less per capita educating its children than the other towns. There is a significant disagreement within the town about funding education. Many well-educated middle-class professionals urge the Town to spend more but an older more commercially oriented community resists further tax burdens.

NATIONAL ASSESSMENTS

In 1990, for the first time, Maine voluntarily participated in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) which is " a Congressionally mandated project of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), The U.S. Department of Education" (NAEP, 1993, p. i). Touted as The Nation's Report Card" the NAEP " is the nation's only ongoing, comparable, and representative assessment of student achievement (NAEP, 1993, p. 1).

Tests given in 1992 were redesigned to the extent that " the changes in the reading framework and assessment activities preclude any comparison between the results in this report and those for previous NAEP reading assessments" (NAEP, 1993, p. 3). The tests used a "variety of innovative assessment approaches that are considered significant advancements over previous assessments" (NAEP, 1993, p. 2). A quick review of questions given in these tests shows that they were much more thorough and demanding than those on multiple choice type tests and required that students read a text and compose answers to questions of varying difficulty.

The testers set levels of achievement and measured student performance against these levels:Basic, Proficient and Advanced. Having such goals enabled researchers to look at achievement in ways not possible through multiple choice tests. The new test used 'scale anchoring', employed as a technique by NAEP since 1985, but:

> in a new way. As implemented for this report, the scale anchoring process applies not to regular scale

> intervals (standard deviation units), but to the achievement levels established for fourth-, eighth-, and twelfth-grade students.... The critical distinction here is that setting achievement levels attempts to describe what students should be able to do in various ranges of the NAEP scale while the anchoring procedure attempts to describe what they can do at those achievement levels, using actual performance data from the NAEP assessments.
>
> NAEP, 1993, p. 4

The reading assessments were taken by over 140,000 students in public, private and parochial schools and the math assessments by nearly 250,000 students in fourth-, eighth- and twelfth-grades (NAEP, 1993 and 1993b, p. 4.) The 1992 Reports Cards focus primarily on the 4th grade results.

Maine's children did extremely well on the NAEP. Fourth graders ranked second in the nation on reading assessments, averaging 228 or one point below top-ranking New Hampshire. Four % of Maine's 4th graders were at or above the advanced level, 31% at or above the Proficient level and 72% at or above the Basic level. Twenty-eight percent were below the Basic level, still much too large a number of students, but well below 27 other states in which over 40% of 4th graders failed to achieve even a basic level of reading (NAEP, 1993, p. 19).

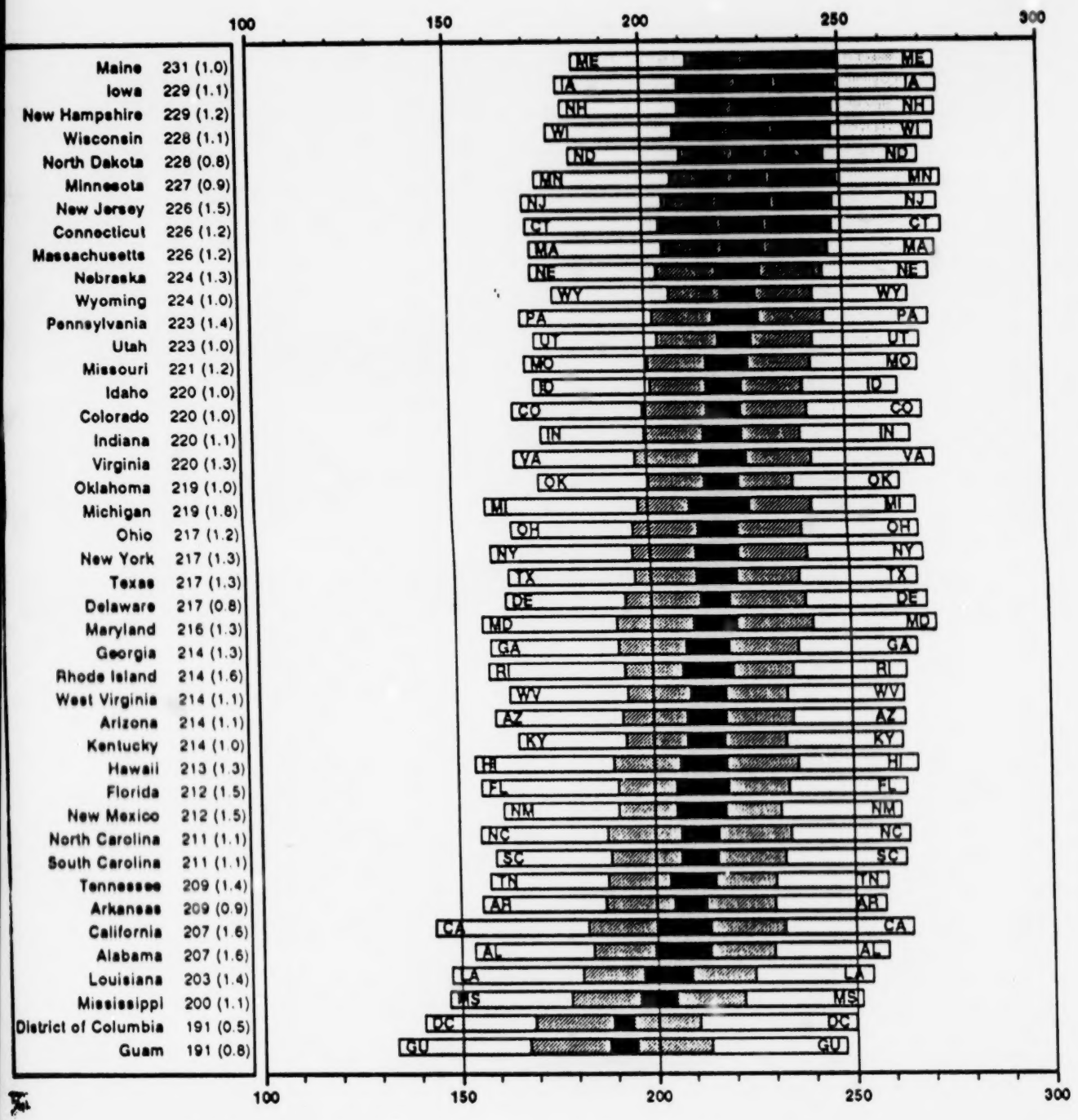
In math the results were even more impressive. Maine's fourth graders ranked number one in the entire nation. Three percent achieved at or above the Advanced level, 28% were at or above Proficient, and 76% were at or above the Basic level. Results of twenty-four percent of students were below basic level, which was the lowest percentage in this category of the 42 States and one territory participating in the tests.

Eighth graders in Maine were 4th in the nation in math, with

URE 1.7

Distribution of Overall Mathematics Proficiency Organized by Average Proficiency
1992 Grade 4

THE NATION'S REPORT CARD



Percentiles of Performance

5th 25th 75th 95th

Mean and confidence interval

The center *darkest* box indicates a simultaneous confidence interval around the average mathematics proficiency for the state based on the Bonferroni procedure for multiple comparisons. Center boxes that do not overlap indicate significant differences between between states in average mathematics proficiency. The *darker shaded* boxes indicate the ranges between the 25th and 75th percentiles of the mathematics proficiency distribution, and the *lighter shaded* boxes the ranges between the 5th to 25th percentiles and the 75th to 95th percentiles of the distribution.

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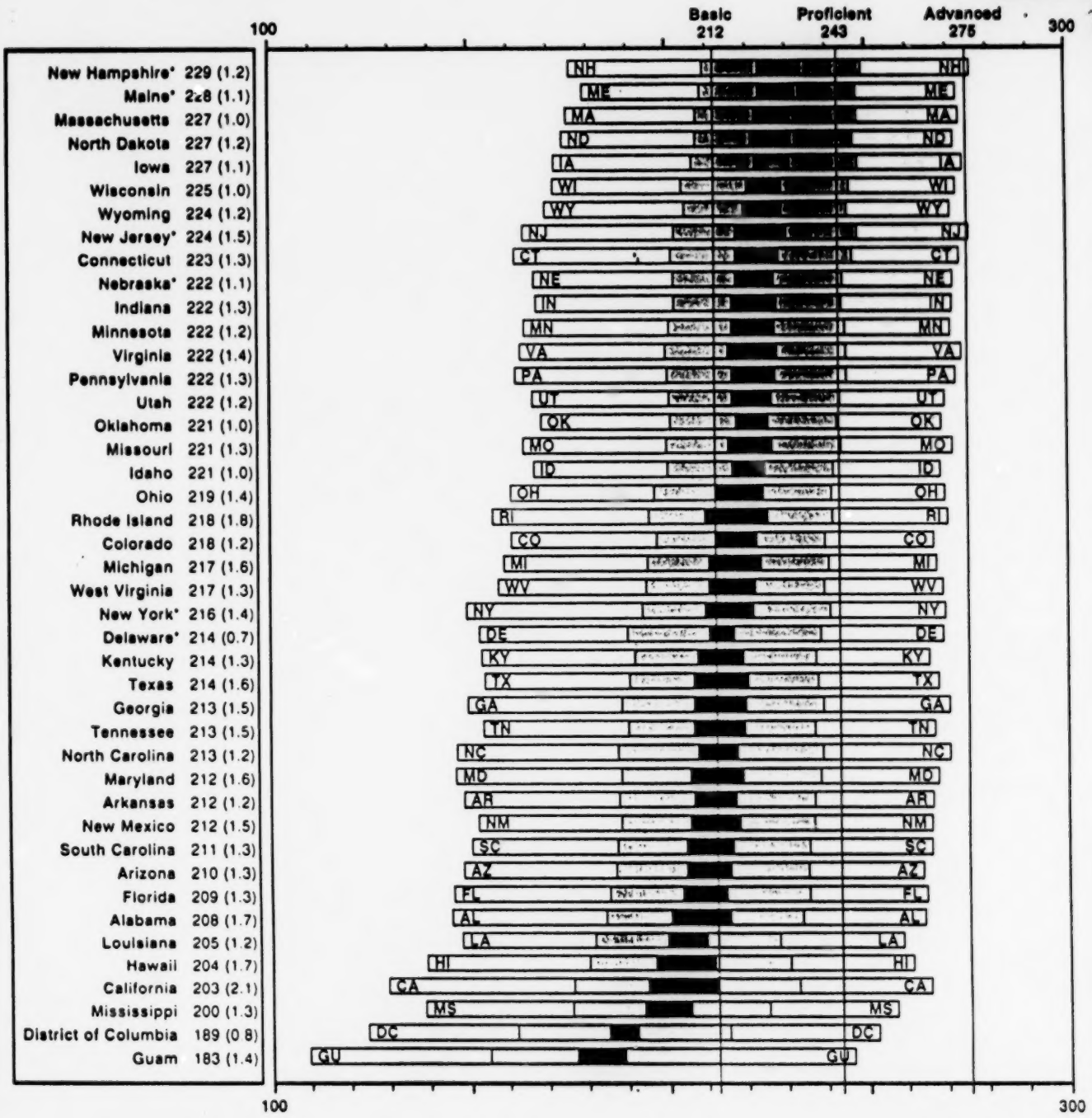
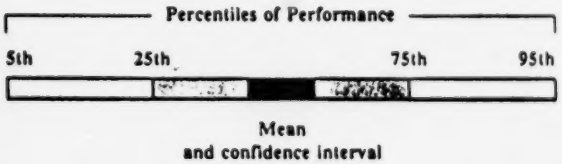
FIGURE 2.2 | **Distribution of Overall Reading Proficiency Organized by Average Proficiency 1992 Grade 4**

THE NATION'S REPORT CARD





The center ***darkest*** box indicates a simultaneous confidence interval around the average reading proficiency for the state based on the Bonferroni procedure for multiple comparisons. The ***darker shaded*** boxes indicate the ranges between the 25th and 75th percentiles of the reading proficiency distribution, and the ***lighter shaded*** boxes the ranges between the 5th to 25th percentiles and the 75th to 95th percentiles of the distribution.

*Did not satisfy one or more of the guidelines for sample participation rates (see Appendix for details).

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4% achieving at or above Advanced level, 31% at or above Proficient, and 77% at or above Basic level. Only 23% were below the Basic level. Four other states reported lower percentage in this category.

The percentiles of distribution in Math and Reading are narrower in Maine than in other states, reflecting in part, the homogeneous racial and cultural background of students (NAEP, 1993, p. 22). This becomes even more clear when we look at "Average Reading/Mathmatics Proficiency by Race/Ethnicity" which indicate 4% of students in Maine are Hispanic, averaging 210 or 18 points below other populations and that the number of Black or Asian/Pacific Islander and American Indian sample is too small for results to be significant(NAEP, 1993, 1993 B, p. and pgs. 19 and 95).

The NAEP showed advantaged urban students scored higher on the tests than students in disadvantaged urban, extreme rural or the general category of "other" that encompassed 70% of all students. Only 2% of Maine's 4th graders were considered advantaged urban and only another 2% disadvantaged urban.

It is significant that 23% of Maine's fourth graders were categorized as "Extreme Rural" on the reading assessment and 19% for the math assessment (discrepancy not explained) which NAEP describes as including " the approximately 10 percent of students attending schools in the most rural areas, where many of the parents were farmers or farm workers" (NAEP. 1993 B, p. 117). These students averaged 227 in reading and 231 in Math, only one point behind the State average in reading and the same as the

high average overall in Math. Seventy-three percent of 4th graders from "other" communities averaged 229 in reading and 231 in math, the same level achieved by students in New Hampshire, in reading only one point above students considered to live in disadvantaged areas and in math the exact same level.

Children whose parents had been to college or had had some post High School education scored significantly higher (236 in reading and 240 in math) than those whose parents had not. Fourth graders in Maine whose parents had graduated from high school outscored children in the same category in both reading and math from all the other states except North Dakota whose children scored equally well in reading and children from Wisconsin who scored as well in math. Maine was the only state to have fourth graders in this category outscore other children in both assessment (NAEP, 1993, 1993 B, p. 28 and p. 139). These findings are provocative, but it would be dangerous to draw conclusions without further study. One has to wonder, however, if these results demonstrate further the high regard in which people from Maine seem to hold education.

We learn from the NAEP that in twenty states the per capita income and the gross state product per student was lower. Only eight states show a lower population density than Maine's. An interesting statistic, one we can not fully explore in this paper, but noted in the MEA and NEAP reports, is the fact that only seven other states have fewer students involved in the free lunch program. Clearly, in a low-income state, many more children would be eligible than are receiving assistance (NAEP,

1993, p. 272).

We learn that only New Jersey had a lower student/teacher ratio. Maine's averages 13.9 stduents per teacher. Seventeen states pay teachers less and only ten states pay more per student for education. Curiously, in thirty-three states students spend at least one week more per year in class and in thirty-two states the school day is at least an hour longer (NAEP, 1993, p. 274).*

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

After seeing how successful Maine's children have been on national tests is it particularly distressing that relatively few go on to college or any training after high school. In the State about 56 % of graduating high school seniors go on to college or other training (Me. Ed. Facts., 1991, p. 28) On Mount Desert about 65% continue their education. In Tremont, however, the percentage is smaller. We can not support this contention by anything more substantive than anecdotal evidence from Val Perkins, the Principal of Tremont and informal discussions with parents from Tremont. However, it seems that some students are prevented from continuing because they lack the money to do so, while others do not see a need to continue. For some students, the supportive community has provided such a warm nest that it is difficult to move out, even on a temporary basis. Most of these graduates are absorbed into a local work force, often into a business owned by parents or other relatives.

*Maine's high scores may be due in part to the relatively low participation rate for targeted schools. Only 62% of schools in Maine randomly selected actually participated in the test. Although "no major differences in the demographic characteristics of the schools that participated and those that declined" the NAEP report is not "statistically pure"(Ed.Week,Jan. 19, 1994).

THE CURRENT DEBATE

On October 28, 1993 the Superintendent of Schools met with members of the School Board and community to discuss consolidating middle schools on the Island. The Superintendent stressed that the underlying cause was increasing enrollment in Bar Harbor, Tremont and Southwest Harbor forcing each of these towns to consider expanding its facilities not concern about the program offered in the elementary schools. Although he acknowledged that pooling students would enable towns to pool resources and provide better science and computer labs as well as other facilities, to the public he appeared to be neutral on the issue. In a private conversation he told me he was actually against the idea.

At the meeting Farnham Butler, who forty-four years earlier had been a forceful advocate for consolidation of the high schools, spoke again strongly supporting middle school consolidation for Mount Desert Island. He pointed to success of the consolidated high school and urged people to think about the benefits better teachers and facilities in a consolidated middle school could offer.

A member of the school board concurred. In answer to a man who stated he had "no kids in school, no kids at all. There's no problem with our education" she replied " I have to question that there is no problem with school: no science labs, inadequate "technology, no foreign language capabilities. Others, particularly from Bar Harbor, supported the importance of science and computer labs, however, most people seemed scared of

increased costs and loss of control over their school. Many said they wanted to do what was best for the children but had to be sure they didn't take on increased tax burdens.

The Superintendent wanted people to discuss their interest in the idea and did not present a finished plan precisely because he wanted to elicit community ideas. Those present almost seemed to resent this, criticizing the Superintendent for not knowing what he wanted to do and having half-baked ideas. After somewhat rancorous discussion, one member of the school board summarized the meeting and suggested a process that appealed to everyone:

> What's in the best interest of the students? Let's ignore the finances for now and look at what is the best way to educate middle school kids. Once that discussion takes place it will become obvious what we should do and then we can look at the finances.
>
> Henry, October 28, 1993

The meeting adjourned after the School Board decided to hold a community meeting in each town to allow citizens to discuss consolidating the middle school grades.

In January the School Board in each town invited citizens to discuss the issue. The meetings were poorly attended and "poor attendance was interpreted, in part , as a sign of the lack of interest in the proposal. Those who did attend voiced support for middle schools, but not one outside their own town (Bangor Daily News, Jan. 22/23, 1994, p. 1).

It was interesting, but not surprising, that more people attended the meeting in Tremont than in any of the other towns. The meeting in Tremont attracted more than thirty-five people, only fourteen were at the Mount Desert meeting and about thirty -

five at the meeting in Southwest Harbor. About fifteen people attended the meeting in Bar Harbor.

At the Tremont meeting a few people spoke in support of a consolidated middle school of children from Southwest Harbor and Tremont but most spoke strongly against the idea of any consolidation. One woman stated that although there might be academic advantages to consolidation, she was worried that as more parents worked or were divorced the school was an increasingly critical source of support and understanding for its children. She praised the school for " not letting kids fall through the cracks" and helping students learn tolerance and cohesion." She added, that parents would be less likely to go to a larger consolidated school.

Another parent said she didn't like the idea of middle school students being isolated, removed from their community and children of different ages. Many parents spoke with eloquence arising from strongly held emotions supporting the school and thanking the teachers and staff for caring so much about their children. They ended the meeting voting to tell the School Board Tremont opposed consolidation and agreeing to work with the building committee to explore ways to improve the school facility.

In the Mount Desert meeting parents said much the same thing, although there was more discussion of the advantages of a "middle school philosophy." Several parents noted that they didn't want children bussed out of the community because they enjoyed having them in town and agreed that it was important for

younger children to learn from older students and for the older students to learn by helping younger children.

The Principal pointed out that the town of Mount Desert would pay about $1,500,000 as its share of a new school and that if that money were put into the existing elementary school in the town it could become the " best in the world" (Ashmore, Jan. 12, 1994). However, he knew that would never happen as he has a hard time getting his budget approved each year. He hoped the current conversation about school needs would generate more vocal support for the school. The meeting adjourned after people talked about the need to hook the elemntary schools electronically and offer more activities between the schools.

I think re-consideration of consolidation has been useful as a means to focus community interest on the schools, and particularly the middle school grades. Perhaps this is what the Superintendent had in mind in the first place. Principal Ashmore had said earlier that he has a hard time convincing some parents that any reforms are needed and that his school should try team-teaching, heterogenous grouping, etc. (Ashmore, Nov. 12, 1993, Interview.) There is a chance increased public awareness of the need for ways to educate children and higher expectations may enable the schools to initiate changes.

The head of the School Board stated " If there are citizens who wanted a middle school, we haven't heard from them"...and "that she would not be surprised if the board decides to end discussion (Bangor Daily News, Jan. 22/23, 1993, p. 1.) School Board members will decide on January 27, 1994, if they want to

continue considering a consolidated middle school.

CONSOLIDATION OF RURAL SCHOOLS:

When an idea becomes an ideology, it can suppress dissent and even the possibility of dissent. From 1930 to 1980, the policy of consolidation of public schools in the United States became such an ideology. As such, the policy needs re-examination.

Studying consolidation should help us question current assumptions, ideas and ideologies. Many of the "truths" of consolidation, including the benefits of tracking or busing students, look questionable examined from a distance, which should blunt any tendency to arrogance we have as policymakers

We need, as educators and educated people, to question our own assumptions, asking to what degree they spring from the social and cultural contexts in which we live and have lived. We need to ask if policies and structures built on these assumptions fit the needs of our students.

The policy of consolidation has not ended. Writing in 1992, Alan J. DeYoung and Craig B. Howley state that the "threat of school closures persists as perhaps the most important concern in many rural American communities " (DeYoung and Howley, 1992, p.1).* But, the focus seems to have shifted to middle school. Advocates of a "Middle School Philosophy," push consolidation of middle school grades as a way to achieve the same goals consolidation of high schools have failed to attain (BHT, Oct. 28, 1993, p.1).

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*On November 30, 1993, The Bangor Daily News reported that a gubernatorial task force studying options for school funding had recommended that Maine offer more incentives to consolidate schools (Bangor Daily News, Nov. 30, 1993, p. 15).

The second, but not secondary concern, in this paper is how consolidation affected rural students , those who live in a township with fewer than 2500 people. In 1987-88, Frank W. Lutz, writing for the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, noted that 27% of American students live in such areas (Lutz, 1990, p.1).

Perhaps an even more important reason to look at rural schools is that there is a great deal to learn from their experience and success. As Dr. Henry Ashmore, Principal of the Mount Desert Elementary School said, " we are on the cutting edge of the current thinking because we never changed " (Ashmore, Nov. 10, 1993, interview). It is a bit like discovering an example of an 18th century house whose owners have never had the funds to modernize. What we find may have classic integrity that is a rare delight; something to learn from and admire although it may not have some amenities we have come to expect. Understanding rural resistance to consolidation may help us create more appropriate programs for rural communities.

In this paper, we began by looking at a case study: consolidation of the fourteen village schools on MDI into one high school and four elementary schools, paying particular attention to consolidation of the high schools. We will look now at the history of consolidation, the social, cultural, and historical factors underlying the movement and its impact on rural areas in the United States. We will examine interpretations of these causes and try to link the local debate over consolidation to larger themes.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The first schools in New England usually consisted of one room in which one-teacher taught the "Three R's" to children of families willing and able to support their education. Families boarded the teacher on a rotating basis and volunteered labor and materials in a variety of ways. Very wealthy families hired tutors to prepare their offspring for different responsibilities, with young gentlemen preparing for college to which they often went with their valets, and young ladies preparing for a life of elegant "domestic service. " In the early 19th Century, the debate between Jacksonian and Jeffersonian democracy seems to have affected rural families. Being cash poor might have influenced parents' decisions, but many seem also to have agreed with Jackson that though "common schools leveled the social playing field ... physical labor and hard work could teach better lessons to would-be leaders than years of book study " (DeYoung and Howley, 1992 , p. 6).

In 1874, the Michigan Supreme Court had ruled that "taxes could be levied to support public high schools as well as elementary schools" (Toch, 1991, p.24). However, "at the turn of the century, less than 9 percent of all those of high school age were enrolled in school, and fewer still -- 6 percent-- actually graduated " (Toch, 1991, p. 42.)

In 1893, the Committee of Ten, chaired by Harvard President Charles W. Eliot, "argued that the primary task of secondary education should be to develop and discipline students' minds through the teaching of academic subject matter, " but the

Committee admitted they were only attempting to educate the minds of the minority (Toch, 1991, p.42).

At the turn of the century, a confluence of events joined to change educational patterns. A tide of immigrants flooded into the cities and rural areas that did not ebb until the Immigration Act of 1924. This excess of labor and, for some reformers, a humane desire to improve conditions, led labor leaders and social reformers to urge passage of laws to curtail employment of children. Reformers believed that schools could and should socialize or "Americanize" children of these immigrants who were most often poor, illiterate, and unskilled. In response, states began to pass laws requiring compulsory education.

In the late 19th century, Emile Durkheim had suggested that schools should play an important role in creating the nation state. "Such schooling, under the auspices of the state, would substitute its teachings for the more particularistic teaching of families or churches in traditional communities " (DeYoung and Howley, 1992, p. 17). Max Weber argued that as the state becomes more complex "provincial activity" must be redirected to goals consistent with building a national social and economic order in the modern world and that rural schools should "be concerned with producing students with the skills and values required for the pursuit of national goals and occupational possibilities " DeYoung and Howley, 1992, p. 18).

To deal with the job of 'processing' children, many of whom were living in urban tenements, educators looked to urban models. Seeing the factory as an efficient means of production led them

to view education as an assembly line where rigid schedules and standardized texts would compensate for the deficiencies of poorly trained teachers and unruly students. School architecture even began to resemble factory design (Nachtigal, 1988, p.6).

The new standardized intelligence tests suggested that immigrant children were incapable of learning academic subjects. Progressives, who saw the schools as a "fundamental lever of social and political regeneration" (Toch, 1991, p. 45) for these children, joined social workers in urging schools to include programs that would socialize their charges, usually at the expense of academically demanding courses. The need to process these children efficiently was further justification for consolidation of schools.

Another important factor in the move to consolidate schools was the apparent success of business in creating powerful monopolies that seemed to marshall resources efficiently to achieve a goal. "As corporate capitalism became dominant, local autonomy and small schools came to be seen as the enemies of 'progress'..." anachronistic because they couldn't be centrally controlled " (Sher, Ed., 1977, p. 34). John Dewey and other Progressives saw education as a way to democratize society and called for " a new view of culture extending beyond traditional preoccupation with language and literature to an inclusive concern with the whole vast panorama of human affairs " (Toch, 1991, p. 47). This more humane approach to socialization and education was distorted by educators who believed many of their students were uneducable and by others who believed the market

based capitalistic economy required centralization.

By 1930, consolidation was generally accepted as beneficial; however, the Great Depression curtailed attempts to consolidate schools because there was no money to build and maintain expensive, new buildings. In some areas, communities had to close schools because there was no money to keep them open.

After World War II , the re-vitalized economy, based on successful mass production, reinforced the benefits of consolidation. However, memories of Fascism, Nazism, and the Empire of Japan, all centrally controlled systems, deterred Americans from further centralizing their schools.

In the 1950's, aversion to consolidation was swept away by the launching of Sputnik and concern that American children were not being taught skills necessary in a modern, science-dependent economy. Again, educators looked to consolidation as a way to improve the efficiency of educational 'delivery systems,' and educate America's children for the 20th century. Nationally known educators such as Jerrold Zacharias of MIT and James B. Conant, President of Harvard, were enormously influential champions of consolidation (Powell, 1985, p. 281.) Improvement in solutions to problems of transportation and other forms of communication enabled consolidators to continue their work. By the end of the 1960's, few schools remained that had not become part of a consolidated or centralized system.

PROMISES OF CONSOLIDATION

There were problems with American schools, particularly rural schools, that consolidators hoped to correct. The one-room schoolhouses were often in disrepair, lacked indoor plumbing and heat and were unsafe. Poorly trained teachers taught children of widely different ages and could offer only "the basics." They worked in schools with old textbooks and few supplementary materials, and certainly not 'modern' science laboratories. Rarely could they offer much in the way of extra-curricular activities in music, art, theater or sports, and rarely were they supervised by professionally trained administrators. Children with mental, social or physical handicaps received little extra help or special guidance.

Consolidation promised "newer and bigger institutions, professionally administered." Efficient management, just as in business, would control costs, supervise teachers and produce a better-trained 'product.' Children would be taught by teachers trained in specific subject matter and methodology and supervised by professional administrators, the superintendents. Students would enjoy more diverse courses and an inviting range of extra-curricular activities in safe, new buildings with all modern conveniences. Many reformers stressed that professional guidance personnel would greatly assist students in pursuit of their educational goals ( ).

Reformers thought it was critical to consolidate rural schools. " This seems to be a desireable policy for continued efforts to bring about reorganization of our rural school

districts, so badly needed if schools are to provide educational programs of the quality which rural schools have a right to expect (NEA, 1955, p. 127).

Reformers such as John H. Davis, who directed a program in agriculture and business at Harvard, urged quite drastic methods to assure consolidation:

> When an important adjustment is desireable or inevitable with respect to population,production,..farm methods, or the like, it is better that it take place promptly and orderly [sic] rather than it be blocked. Therefore, all government programs or aids for agriculture should be designed, in terms of incentives, towards the implementation of such adjustments. This should apply to efforts such as research, extensive education, conservation, and credit as well to price support programs. NEA, 1955, p. 229

Relentless pressure exherted by supporters of the policy of consolidation led to an extraordinary change in the organization of American education. By 1991-92, 88.1% of the schools that had existed in 1931-32 had been closed or consolidated.

TABLE III

RATE of CONSOLIDATION

The move to consolidate schools reaches back into the origins of public education in America, but became an enormously powerful force between 1940 and 1970. Maine passed a law in 1893 establishing a town system of education which formalized pressure to consolidate (Sher, Ed., 1977, p. 19).

YEAR	% of DECLINE	# DISTRICTS	# SCHOOLS
UNITED STATES			
1931-32	Base	127,531	238,000
1941-42	10%	115,493	
1951-52	45%	71,094	
1961-62	73%	35,676	
1971-72	86%	17,995	
1981-82	88%	15,912 (1)	
1991-92	88.1%	15,173	84,578 (2)
MAINE			
1991-92		283	743
One-Room Schools:USA			
1950			60,000
1970			2,000 (3)
One-Room School:Maine			
1949			676
1991			8 (4)

1. Lutz, 1990, p. 1.
2. Whalen, 1993, interview.
3. Sher, Ed., 1977, p.39.
4. Maine Department of Education, 1991, p. 7.

CONSOLIDATION IN RURAL AREAS

Fifty-three percent of the 83,248 public schools in the U.S. in 1987-88 educating 27% of our students were in rural areas. Early attempts to consolidate rural schools stemmed partly from an earnest will to correct inequities. For example, in the 1940's it was estimated that 3.5 million rural children were not enrolled in school. Those who did go to school were there for an average of 167 days while urban children averaged 181 school days per year. In 1942, per pupil expenditures averaged eighty-six dollars per year for rural children versus $124 for urban children (Peshkin, 1982, p.20).

Rural areas were particularly vulnerable to the blandishments of consolidators. Reeling from The Great Depression, loss of agricultural and manufacturing jobs and in some parts of the country, the loss of jobs in mining and energy production, rural areas saw their tax bases erode as land values fell. In all categories, attacked by consolidators, rural schools seemed to fall short, and consolidation, particularly with promises of government funding, seemed the way to solve the many problems faced by American schools.

Consolidation was an essentially urban solution based on urban models. " By consistently advocating the adoption of urban standards, urban innovation, urban architecture, urban textbooks, urban curricula and urban trained educators, these reformers were able to perceive themselves as rescuing rural schools by rejecting their uniquely rural character and heritage" (Sher, Ed., 1977, p. 10).

The policy of consolidation was implemented by men trained as urban superintendents. "The scientific and professional views of schooling pioneered by urban superintendents migrated into state departments of education, from which positions of authority they undercut many of the principles that had hitherto captured the interests of rural citizens." These men were often trained in the double skills of management and education and offered impressive credentials to back up the changes they proposed to professionalize education(DeYoung and Howley, 1992, p. 10).

Some rural people may have disdained purely academic education, but many saw education, however defined, as a way to give their children a chance for a better life. They could see that their schools were run-down and poorly equipped; they knew there were severe limitations on courses and programs offered their children in one-teacher schools, and many school buildings, such as those on Mt. Desert Island, did not meet minimal safety and health standards (Survey, 1949, p. 53).

Rural schools were closely tied to the communities they served. Often the schools relied on the volunteer help of parents to provide everything from transportation to building maintenance and food for student lunches (DeYoung and Howley, 1992, p. 10). " The traditional sense of involvement, intimacy and identification between rural parents and their schools diminished. By inaugurating a formalized, standardized and urbanized educational system, the traditional continuity between rural education and rural life was weakened " (Sher, Ed., 1977, p.41).

One of the saddest and most bitter themes of rural life has been the continuous emigration of its children forced by a withering rural economy to seek work in urban areas. Even now, when this migration has been staunched by the realities of urban life, rural people still talk as if it is inevitable that their children, particularly the "brightest and the best," will leave.

Consolidators played on this raw nerve by making rural people think they must adopt an urban model of education to help prepare their children for the likely prospect that they would leave home to find work. However, "by inculcating rural children with urban values, urban inspiration and urban skills, reformers encouraged out-migration while discouraging the preservation and improvement of traditional, rural schools and communities" (Sher, Ed.,1977, p. 41). Encouraging out-migration further undermined rural people's faith in their own communities making them feel they could not give their children first-rate education or opportunities, and blinding them to the strengths of their own culture and schools.

UNDERLYING CAUSES

Several researchers have identified causes underlying consolidation including economic, political and class . Others allude to the importance of culture, a factor worthy of greater consideration.

POLITICAL/ECONOMIC

Writing on the same issues as Durkheim and Weber, DeYoung and Howley, in their article "The Political Economy of Rural School Consolidation," combine political and economic themes stating that the "dilemma of the modern state, therefore, consists of the need to conceal the inherent inequalities and contradictions from those whom the political economy disenfranchises as a result of the accumulation of capital." By encouraging people to believe in the importance of education, "schooling and economic growth assume an ideological nature...propagating the belief among the public that school competition is a prerequisite for employment ... [that] triggered a demand for education far in excess of the number of individuals who can in almost any nation - find appropriate employment " (DeYoung and Howley, 1992, p. 23).

In a way, as we will see with Weaver's discussion of class, education can create rather than diminish distinctions - by creating a class of those who have successfully gotten an education. The irony is that "the state is the site for mediating inequalities (class, race, gender). But it must also secure a productive economic system based on the progressive

accumulation of wealth and, hence , an inequality " (DeYoung and Howley, 1992, p. 22.).

If carried to a conclusion, this argument seems specious. The State doesn't create a need for education, which, in turn, creates classes of those who have an education and those who do not. Not every successful entrepreneur, writer, or statesman has a fine education, but having such an education makes it more likely a person will succeed in whatever engages his or her commitment and effort.

In a form of Darwinian determinism, being educated, knowing how to learn, and knowing as much as one can about a task, makes success more likely. The state, as it represents its people, or, at least, those who are most vocal, becomes a proponent of education in hopes that well educated students will become successful citizens. In a crisis, such as the launching of "Sputnik" or an economic recession, the state "tighten[s] the perception of instrumental connection between schooling and economic prosperity " (DeYoung and Howley, 1992,p. 26). We add that people respond because crises pull them out of complacency, and they again value skills that enable them to compete.

The power of the state is immense. Exerted through legislation, and funding or with-holding funds, the state can mold opinion and policy. DeYoung and Howley conclude that "policies allegedly contributing to economic development -- provide the clearest insight [into consolidation], as compared with classical theories that take economic growth to be a 'natural' phenomenon inevitably trailing social progress in its

wake" (DeYoung and Howley, 1992, p. 37).

The state pays for educating its young because of a "trade-off." "The state ' induces individuals to abandon their identification with community, king , or tribe and become national citizens.' Citizens become entitled to free education because they accept the trade-off and believe credentials legitimate entrance to workplaces - a workplace controlled by the state " (DeYoung and Howley, 1992, p. 22). In a nation of states with individual characteristics abandoning community and tribe to become national citizens can have particularly interesting consequences.

CLASS

Timothy Weaver suggests social class underlies consolidation. The discussion of class, just as discussion of elitism, makes Americans uncomfortable, perhaps because class seems immutable, impervious to change. Class, like aristocracy, travels with an individual regardless of changing circumstances, although great wealth or villainy and the passage of a few generations can create or erase "class." Unfortunately, much like the term "status," the word "class" is often misunderstood and misused, carrying with it unintended connotations of position within society.

Weaver points out that "classlessness is particularly cherished in rural America." Rural people will know who has means and who doesn't, but there is a deep-rooted sense that everyone who is part of the community has the same rights and an equal voice * (Sher, Ed., 1977, p.).

However, the tension of underlying class distinctions can be seen in battles fought over school consolidation. Weaver's thesis is that an "undercurrent of conflicting class interests has permeated the consolidation debate. [D]esire to further class differences is an underlying cause of consolidation." (Sher,Ed.,

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*This does not seem to extend to "people from away" who are seen as having a right to impose their will perhaps because they pay the bills, occupy a high status or "know more." Often rural people who serve as maids, contractors, caretakers, etc. will not contradict their employer even if they know the employer is making a mistake in judgement because s/he doesn't know local conditions. Their reluctance to voice a contradictory opinion seems to diminish if they have known the summer person as a child, but I have often observed year-round people acting a "step-and-fetchit" role with "summer people."

1977, p. 160). He points out that middle class people pushed for consolidation, which was usually carried out at the expense of poorer people in smaller villages and sparsely populated areas.

Consolidation reflected middle-class values of efficiency, professionalism and 'opportunities ' geared to middle-class goals. Predictably, people who supported consolidation lived closer to the proposed site for the new school, most often in the wealthiest town in the district. "The powerful take what they can and the weak suffer what they must. Schools will be removed from the communities that can least afford to lose them and will be placed in communities and will be placed in communities already doing relatively well (Sher,Ed., 1977, p 23).

As we have seen, consolidation was an urban policy inappropriate for rural communities. Weaver quotes findings of West, Tyack, Barker and Gump, in making an essential point:

> The small-town school has a different kind of symbolic meaning. Schools came to be valued in themselves, quite apart from the goal of teaching cognitive skills and the specific knowledge required to enter professional and managerial careers... [In short] the small-town school has a different kind of symbolic meaning. Sher, Ed., 1988, p. 201.

The policy of consolidation was insensitive to rural needs, character and tradition. It is ironic that the current reform movement in education is based on a discovery of qualities rural communities have always valued.

CULTURE

Anthropologist Robert F. Murphy defines the term as follows: " Culture is an integrated system of meanings, values, and standards of conduct by which the people of a society live and which is transmitted between generations through socialization....it refers to the rules and prescribed forms for conduct, not to the behavior itself." Culture is " a system of expectations" (Murphy, 1989, p 26.) and an "encyclopedia of all the knowledge, beliefs, and techniques of survival accumulated over the ages by a society, either through the innovations of its own members or through emulation of neighboring peoples (Murphy, 1989, p. 28).

The concept of culture, we believe, can be helpful in understanding the character of small towns and their identification with their schools. We prefer the term culture rather than class partly because it does not carry the pejorative distinctions of upper , middle and lower class and because it is much more inclusive and helps us understand the complexity of peoples' reactions to consolidation.

Alan Peshkin hints at the importance of culture as a tool for understanding resistance to consolidation when he sets the following task for himself. "I shall take a closer look at the community in the light of seven, key concepts: boundaries, integrity, the community schools, consolidation and centralization, loss and secession" (Peshkin, 1982, p. 155.) When we look at the consolidation of schools on Mount Desert Island, we will explore these themes further.

RECENT RESEARCH

Most schools were consolidated because trained, educational professionals and middle class citizens felt that only through consolidation could schools become modern and efficient and offer their students the benefits of professional expertise. In the past few years, our understanding of these 'benefits' has changed. Policy makers seem, in some ways, wonderfully naive, always hopeful that the next new policy they devise will be the panacea. Problems stem from their insensitivity to the people who have to live with and implement these policies. It is discouraging to think that the reforms we envision now may be the tried and untrue policies we work to undo in another generation. Perhaps, we would do better seeing ourselvs as facilitators rather than policy makers.

We have only to look at William Fowler's essay on the importance of school size to make this point. Consolidators lauded the merits of large schools. What they did not foresee was that larger schools have become "detrimental to student achievements."(Fowler,1992, p.1). Fowler cites studies by Eberts, Kehow and Stone showing that, " although achievement was largely determined by socioeconomic background, smaller elementary schools particularly benefitted black students' achievement" and "all students showed" higher achievement in smaller schools " (Fowler, 1992 ,p.2).

In a twenty year study of twelve schools in which the researchers controlled for student family background, "Miller, Ellsworth and Howell, ...found that the highly achieving schools

were significantly smaller than the poorly achieving schools (Fowler, 1992, p. 2.) DeYoung and Howley cite evidence that "small schools actually blunt the negative effects of educational disadvantage" (DeYoung and Howley, 1992, p. 4.). Tremont School shows us how a small school can offset what are perceived to be "educational disadvantage[s]."

Fowler cites a study by Monk showing that large schools don't necessarily offer diverse ,interesting curricula. Monk concluded that after reaching a student body of 400, school curricula rarely expand in substantive ways. There will be more sections, but the cost saving of large class size even out at 400 students (Fowler, 1992, p. 23). Moreover, few students have chosen demanding electives, and the high school curriculum remains much as it has been even though curriculum enrichment was one of the primary benefits touted by consolidators (Powell, 1985, p. 44).

Another key benefit promised by consolidators was choice and diversity in extra-curricular activities. Even in this area, Fowler shows us that consolidation fails when examined closely. Several researchers studying rates of participation found that school size and student participation in activities is highly correlated (Fowler, 1992, p. 22). Weaver cites a study by Barker and Gump in which they " found that the actual proportion of students who can particpate in the essential activities that support the academic program, the quality of that involvement, and the satisfaction with that involvement clearly favor the smaller local school over the larger consolidated school (Sher,

Ed.,1977, p. 193).

The larger the school the smaller the rate of participation, particularly for female students, and the higher the rate of loneliness, alienation, substance abuse and students who drop-out (Fowler, 1992,p.9). Fowler explains the important concept of 'manning.' In a small school, even students on the margins of social activities are encouraged to participate because they are needed to 'man' activities. In large schools, these students drift to the fringe and stay there (Fowler,1977, p. 18).

Busing, once praised as an "educative experience and a means of strengthening community life and activities ," is now seen as detrimental to student achievement. (NEA, 1955, p. 9). Weaver quotes Yao-Chi Lu and Luther Tweeter whose study of 8th graders suggests that children lose 4.0 points (on a scale of 100) for each hour they spend on a bus per day (Sher, Ed. 1977, p.181). It seems likely , if Weaver's thesis on the influence of class is correct,that the children who were bussed longest were from the lowest socio-economic strata which would have affected their scores. However, it is not clear if the researchers controlled for this variable.

In a poignant article, "Schooling and the 'Family Crisis', " Charles L. Glenn shows us that the support of a nurturing family is critical to the health, well-being and education of children. Quoting George Santayana, he makes an important point that "while no one dreams of forcibly suppressing private property, religion or the family, American education ignores these things, and proceeds as much as possible as if they did not exist "

(Glenn, 1993, p. 15). Glenn goes on to state that underlying decisions about education is " the disrespect for the family which is unfortunately widespread among professional eductors "... who share " a tendency to a kind of moral imperialism, seeing themselves as uniquely qualified and appointed to define what education is and how it will take place." (Glenn, 1993, p. 19) Although not intended as written to support opposition to consolidation , the viewpoint is one we wish educators working to impose consolidation on rural areas had considered.

Glenn goes on to make a point that becomes particularly relevant when we look at the strengths of the Tremont School on Mount Desert Island.

> It would be difficult to over-emphasize the importance of obtaining a high degree of confidence on the part of parents for the work of the school...Dividing parents from the life of the school, deprive[s] the school of a powerful support for its educational mission...the community of support formed by parents who have confidence in the school and in each other as well.
> Glenn, 1993, p. 24.

It seems clear now that consolidation strained and severed many of the bonds linking communities and schools, and schools became alienated from the communities they served. Without close community support, schools could not function as well and in an unintended irony ended up taking on much of the responsibility for socialization formerly handled by families. Schools were not solely responsible for the fracturing of family cohesion we have seen over the past, several decades, but we should ask to what extent schools may have aided this process by disengaging from parents and distancing themselves from communities.

REALITIES OF CONSOLIDATION

This topic deserves more in-depth research than has been possible for this paper. We must examine several issues suggested in books such as The Shopping Mall High School and in the work of the Coalition of Essential Schools asking to what extent the promises of consolidation have been kept. Has Mount Desert Island High School provided a better education for its students than was possible in the four smaller high schools, have there been any benefits to the towns in having a regional high school in terms of greater cooperation on other issues, is the budget for the regional High School equal or less than for the four high schools?

To find the answers we need to compare data not presently available such as comparative costs, scores assessing academic achievement, range of courses offered and taken by students, percent of student participation in extra-curricular activities and percent graduating and going on to higher education.

SUGGESTIONS FOR SCHOOLS ON MOUNT DESERT ISLAND

The next decade could be enormously exciting and productive for everyone involved with rural schools. Finally, many people in this country realize that we have ignored the needs of children for too long and that the future of empires does indeed rest on the education of youth. (Aristotle). If we use the strengths in rural culture, coupled with technology that will minimize problems of isolation and insularity, we can perhaps, have the best of both worlds.

Jonathan Sher tells us this is a 'magic moment'. "We are between orthodoxies...We have the chance to influence the shape and content of the new orthodoxy" (Sher, 1989, p.15). In view of what we have learned about the old orthodoxy of consolidation it is daunting to think that the magic may last only a moment. A policy crystallizes too quickly and when it hardens it becomes inflexible and unworkable.

Faith Dunne points out that good education for rural areas "must come to mean the invention and adaptation of ways to capitalize on the natural and traditional resources of the rural school, while clearly recognizing the limitation inherent in country living and attempting to compensate for this" (Sher, Ed., 1977, p.81). She adds that it is better for rural schools to "live with their own inherent problems than with problems artificially created by transplanting a suburban world " (Sher, Ed.,1977, p. 112).

The strengths of rural communities include small size, homogeneity (a strength in that it makes for a cohesive

community, a concern when it leads to insularity and ethnocentrism), a relatively low crime rate and incidence of drug use, community loyalty and the central role of the schools in rural commuities.

Obviously new technological breakthroughs and ideas such as computer networking, distance schooling, suitcase exhibits, VCRs, films, and so forth (Sher, Ed., 1977 , p.117), can help overcome problems of isolation for students, teachers, administrators and their communities. However, "we should resist the temptation to become pre-occupied with technological change " (Sher, 1988, p.15) and subordinate interaction between students and teacher.

Rural communities don't have many resources: partly because the great percentage of federal funds go to urban rather than rural areas everything except labor is more expensive in rural areas, and finally because rural people simply are not as wealthy as people in urban areas. This means rural schools must be resourceful and creative, adaptive and co-operative. (Sher, Ed., 1977, p.112).

Many of the efforts to share resources such as Bookmobiles, were discontinued in the 1970 and 1980's when funding education was not a high priority for voters. If rural voters can gain a fair share of federal resources, the money should be put to best advantage. Expanded Book and MediaMobiles would be a tremendous asset to country schools. Maine has already outfitted a touring van with information about colleges, trained personel, and computers programmed to help students search for a good college match (Bangor Daily News, Nov. , 1993, p.).

Parents used to help in schools with everything from maintenance to food preparation, tutoring and coaching. There are many ways in which parents now help in schools, but it is more difficult for them to contribute their time when both parents have to work. Parents, grandparents and other members of the community could be encouraged to participate in the life of schools in many ways, including tax credits, credits by merchandisers, community work days on weekends, and most importantly a change in the attitudes of school personnel which in the past has seemed to distance parents much as possible.

Jonathan Sher suggests schools should teach entrepreneurial skills.

> The part of REAL enterprises that helps schools become incubators of rural small businesses to create jobs - a way to stay and succeed. The program includes classroom instruction in entrepreneurship, applied economics, and small business management with the creation of student-owned and operated ventures.
>
> Sher, 1989, p. 15

He explores the merits of a school based Community Development Corporation in great depth, an idea that could weld the strengths of rural schools as the focus of their communities with the resources of many middle-class professionals who have moved to rural areas.

SUMMARY

In summary, our exploration of the policy of consolidation has led to a greater understanding of the impact of a policy developed by professional educators "foreign" to the rural communities affected by their ideas. This should make us pause when we design new policies, and force us to realize the importance of local culture and of involving local people in creation and implementation of new policies. The danger is that regionalism and local fears will block innovation, but we must work to incorporate local strengths and traditions in creating new structures. If we ignore these strenths and traditions, our ideas will simply not make sense or endure.

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